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STRONG-ARM OF AVALON





OF AVALON



BY MARY T. WAGGAMAN

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BY
MARY T. WAGGAMAN



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STRONG-ARM OF AVALON.

CHAPTER I.

BROTHER AND SISTER.

A GOLDEN day in the early spring of 1655 was drawing to its close.

Already the violet shadows were gathering to the east of the little peninsula where the broad waves of the Chesapeake laved the Maryland shore, but the river sweeping to the bay was still ablaze with sunset light. Cave and creek and inlet flamed rosy red in the parting glow, and the sail of a little boat that had fluttered almost unseen in the noontide radiance gleamed like an oriole's wing in the glowing tints that dyed the stream and sky.

"The sun is down," said a tall, brown-faced youth of sixteen who sat at the helm watching the flapping sail. "There will be no wind to take us across to St. Catherine's this evening, Margot. We may as well go home."

"Oh, not yet, Giles, not yet," answered the fair-haired little maid who sat in the stern. "It is still light, and oh! so beautiful. Look at the sky, Giles; does it not seem like one of those great cathedral windows of which Father Maurice tells us?"

"And which the Roundheads are so bravely smashing now," added the boy grimly. "Though verily, verily," and the speaker's voice took a mocking nasal twang, "if—as our worshipful Master

Baxter hath it—the Scarlet Woman is throned on the Maryland hills, her banner is flaunting boldly to the skies to-night.”

“Master Baxter?” echoed the girl anxiously. “Giles, Giles, surely you have not been to hear his blasphemies?”

“Nay,” laughed the boy, “only I have not had my ears cropped yet, Margot, and Master Baxter wrestling in prayer is like the bellowing of the bull of Bashan.”

“The wicked man!” said Margot, her soft blue eyes flashing. “It was he who drove Father Maurice from St. Mary’s, and yet I have heard mother say that, not five years ago, he fled here black and blue with the stripes that they laid upon him in Virginia, and the Fathers took him into their house and cared for him three months as if he were one of their own. And now he is hunting them down as if they were wild beasts of the woods.”

“Faugh!” said her brother, scornfully. “Baxter is but a hound that runs to whistle and call. If we had only dogs like him to deal with, we could soon whip them to their kennels. But this robber of Kent is of other blood and mettle, Margot. They say he hath sworn to banish the cross of Calvert from the shores of the Chesapeake, if he fights even unto death. Three times has he risen against the lords of the province, and brought woe and bloodshed upon Our Lady’s land. And there is a whisper that this last time he has bidden the evil one to his aid. So is his hand and arm strengthened.”

“Truly, it seems so,” said Margot, with a shudder. “But as Father Maurice has ever taught us, Giles, ‘God ruleth,’ and will help those who trust in Him.”

“Aye, but man’s hand must do His work,” answered the boy, quickly. “Would that I were a man now—”

"What would you do, Giles?"

"I would act like a man and not like a weakling. Margot, Margot, it makes the blood run like fire in my veins to see our people giving way to these Roundheads who killed the good King, and who hate our holy Church and all that it teaches. Think! they have taken Red Oak Manor and Fair Oaks and Shorebanks and Our Lady's Vale, and have driven forth the Bertrands, the de Veres, the Egertons, from their homes, to say naught of Father Maurice and Father Leonard, who have had to fly to the wilderness for safety. Ah! if our father had lived it would have been different. I know he would not have parleyed and waited and sought for peace. No, no; he would have stood forth bravely for home and Church and King."

"Hush, hush, Giles," said his sister, anxiously. "For less than those bold words Ellis Wharton got twenty lashes last week. I wish almost that you were with Father Maurice in the wilderness. You would be far safer than within earshot of Master Baxter and his like."

"Fie upon you, Margot; Father Maurice had to fly from dungeon and chains. Would you have the young master of Avalon hide like a hare in the thicket because of the storm? And though I was but sixteen last Easter day, I can hold my own against Luke Vane and Wirt Martin now."

"Aye, aye," said the little maid, shaking her head. "Father Maurice always said you were far readier with fist and cudgel than book or quill, Giles."

"Would you have the last of the Ventnors a clerk?" asked the boy, proudly. "Book and quill would have done me scant service yestere'en, when that long-eared Hiram Robbins and three of his

mates beset me at Cecilsford, when I was crossing from our plantation beyond the creek. They called me Papist, and idolater, and scoffed at me for worshipping a stone woman—as they called that fair image of our Blessed Mother Mary that stood above our chapel door.”

“Giles! Giles!” exclaimed his sister, breathlessly. “What did you to them?”

“Leaped from my horse and kicked three of them into the creek, where they squirmed around like maggots,” laughed the boy. “They were but puling lads, not worth an honest blow. Then I clinched with Hiram, who is of sturdy build, and throttled the lies in his throat, until he gasped for mercy. Say naught of it to our mother, Margot; it will only trouble her, and her heart is heavy with care for us now. Here we are at the water-stairs, just in time, for the light has faded in your cathedral window, Margot, and our lady mother is watching for you, I know.”

As he spoke, the boy flung a rope around the log that projected from a little wharf jutting out into the stream, and, securing his boat, leaped lightly ashore; and held out his hand to help his sister to his side.

Then both clambered hastily up the rude, grass-grown stairs that went up the steep wooded bank stretching in a park-like plateau along the river. There was no goodlier heritage in all the fair province of Maryland than this Avalon Manor, with its thousand acres of field and forest, meadow and shore; for Giles Ventnor, the elder, had been no mere adventurer when he cast his lot in this new land. A gentleman of birth and fortune, he had stood in favor with the unhappy Charles I. of England, and had married the Catholic queen’s favorite maid of honor, the beautiful

Mélanie Marquette. But his bold profession of the proscribed faith had made him powerful enemies at court, and it was by the kindly advice of King Charles I. himself, that he had accompanied his kinsman, Governor Calvert, to his new domain on the shores of the Chesapeake.

The princely estate of Avalon Manor had been one of the first grants made by the Lord Proprietor of Maryland, and its master had been among the wisest in council and bravest in field of the new province. Three years before our story opens, this true and noble gentleman died, leaving his children, Giles and Margot, wards of their cousin, Lord Baltimore.

To this powerful protection, perhaps, even more than to the youth of its master, Avalon Manor until now had owed its safety, at a time when the Puritans were seizing, confiscating, and banishing the Catholic lords of the soil.

So much in explanation of the position which our young master of Avalon held in this spring evening of 1655, as he strode bravely along under the budding oaks that girdled his fair domain. Far and wide it stretched, with its broad fields upturned for the planting, its barns and granaries, its corn-houses and tobacco-houses. Cows were lowing for the milking; the great farm horses were being taken from their heavy, unwieldy plows, servants, white and black, were gathering from field, forest and shore to the cabins and huts, which were their nightly shelter, for more than sixty dependents called the Manor of Avalon home.

In the midst of this pastoral picture arose the Manor house, its sturdy, wide-reaching walls capped by quaint, peaked towers and gables, which told of the taste of its fair, French mistress, while the small, heavily-leaded window-panes, the massive doors

of barred oak, the great pillars that supported the central porch, recalled the "castled keep" of the old Norman barons from whom the Ventnors had sprung. "Vent du Nord"—"wind of the north"—the old blustering title that had come with William the Conqueror of England, had been gradually softened into Ventnor, but the bold spirit of the race had remained unchanged. Cut into the stone over the threshold of this New World home was the ancient crest, a mailed hand clinched, with the inscription, "Gare le Vent du Nord."

Under this crest passed Giles and Margot in the gathering dusk of the springtime evening. The great oaken door swung open at the boy's touch. The hall within was dim and shadowy. One could only vaguely see the great deer's antlers, laden with guns, fishing-rods, spears, and game-bags, that loomed out on either side of the walls, the cumbrous "settees," the line of portraits along the high wainscot, the broad staircase winding to the right beyond. But a light came from beneath the leathern curtain that veiled a doorway, and both the young Ventnors paused in the shadow without, as they heard voices in excited conversation within. It was a time when even the most indulged children were taught a respect for parents which bordered on religious reverence.

"Mother has visitors this evening," said Margot, hastily; "we must not intrude, Giles."

"Nay," said the young master; "it is they who are intruding, I think, by the tone of her voice. By the cross, if it be one of those Puritan louts striving to frighten her, I will teach him a lesson!"

"Hush, Giles, hush!" whispered his sister, in terror. "Come away, it is not fitting that we should listen—but oh, Giles, it is

some one in sore trouble," continued this little daughter of Eve. "Hear the weeping within."

And both young eavesdroppers paused breathless, as the clear voice of their mother arose in tones of unwonted excitement above the sobs of her companion.

"Will you swear to me that this is no snare, no pitfall; that you are telling me only God's truth?"

"Only God's truth, Madame," was the tremulous answer. "My husband is dying—dying in anguish and despair. All last night was he wrestling with tormenting demons, until I could bear it no longer. I heard that a priest was hiding in Avalon—"

"Then you heard a lie," came the quick, impulsive reply, for Madame Mélanie Ventnor—impetuous daughter of sunny France that she was—had not been tamed by either time or trouble. "There is no priest here. He has been driven forth by the bloodhounds that Maryland has fostered into strength only that they might turn and rend her. Begone, begone! I will hear no more pleading! I can do nothing, nothing. It is God's justice that has fallen upon your miserable husband. Has he not forsworn the faith, turned traitor to God, to King, to Church? Let him die in his sins. Nay, nay," the fierce, excited tone suddenly trembled into softest music. "What is it I say? Alas! I am but a poor, weak woman, broken with much grief and care, and the hot blood coursing in my veins hath always fired unduly my English speech. Forgive me, good friend. I, who am a widow, should compassionate one for whom the same black cloud of grief is gathering, but I can do naught to help you.

"There is no priest in Avalon. Our good Father Maurice is

far from here in safety, where the evil men who are scourging this fair land can not reach."

"Tell me where, where?" pleaded the other, passionately. "I will go seek him, and he will come to my husband, I know."

"Aye, at the cost of his life," replied Madame Ventnor, bitterly. "Think you I will betray him to his own destruction?"

"Nay, I will answer for his safety with my own. Madame, Madame, in God's name, tell me where to find the good Father! By your own grief, by the memory of that death-bed over which you so late have bent, help me to give peace and comfort to a departing soul."

"Hush, hush! You madden, you torture me!" cried Madame Ventnor, sharply. "Alas! I am not fitted to stand alone amid the storms and buffets of this far off world; the strong arm that I leaned upon is broken, the true heart is cold. God pity me, pity me!" and in her sore perplexity, poor little Madame Mélanie Ventnor broke down in a fit of passionate weeping that was too much for the young listeners without. In a moment Giles had swept apart the leathern curtain and was at her side.

CHAPTER II.

THE MISTRESS OF AVALON.

THE room into which Giles and Margot had burst so unceremoniously was broad and low, with oaken rafters and paneled walls. A log fire blazed in the high, brick chimney-place; there were stiff-backed chairs and stools of cumbrous make that might fitly have accommodated the rigid ladies in ruff and stomacher, and fierce gentlemen in armor, whose portraits frowned darkly from the walls.

But a graceful touch had brightened this somewhat gloomy grandeur. Rugs of fur and gaily dyed wool were scattered over the floor, tapestried tablecovers and cushions embroidered in silk and gold showed that the fair mistress of Avalon had not forgotten lessons learned from the good nuns in her sunny French home. Myrtleberry candles were burning in the tall, silver candlesticks on the mahogany table, and with her head bowed in her clasped hands, Madame Ventnor sat sobbing before the hearth.

"Mother," said Giles, "what is it and who is it that troubles you thus?" And his eyes flashed indignantly at the tall, pale, soberly-clad woman who stood near by.

His mother looked up, startled at his voice. In the bitterness of her awakened sorrow, this strong, brave boy seemed suddenly to stand forth in his father's place to comfort and help her.

"I had forgotten. There is a master of Avalon still. He shall decide in God's name. Giles, this is Mistress Deborah Wade, wife of James Wade, of whom you have heard."

"Aye," said the boy, his brow darkening. "Clayborne's minion, to whom the robber of Kent has given Fair Oaks Manor, after driving forth its rightful lords. What have we to do with him or his?"

"The fever has seized him, and he is lying at Fair Oaks ill unto death, and in sore terror of God's judgment."

"And well he may be," added Giles, grimly. "I think I would shake—body and soul—in his place."

"But he would repent and make his peace with Heaven; he hath sent here for the priest."

"The craven cur!" burst forth this young son of the north wind, fiercely. "Surely, you are not hearkening to such a coward's cry, mother? After hounding the good Fathers from their homes and their altars, now to call to them when the devil's claws are at his throat! Let him die like the dog he is."

"Giles, Giles!" interposed little Margot, tremulously. "What would Father Maurice say of wicked words like these? To refuse God's mercy to the dying! to the dying! Think what a sin it would be on our souls. Father Maurice would come if he had to walk through fire. Never have I seen him so wroth as when Chico stopped to stalk a deer that rose in his path when he was sent to call the good Father to the old squaw Winona, who was ill with smallpox, and she died without holy prayer or blessing. Father Maurice said, but that Chico was only fourteen, and had in a manner followed his savage instinct, he would have punished him sorely. As it was, Chico did penance for six months at the

church door, so dreadful a sin is it to be deaf to the cry of a parting soul."

"Margot is right," said her mother, with sudden decision. "Our little maid hath the heavenly wisdom that shames our doubts and rancor, Giles. You know where to find Father Maurice. You must go to him to-night, and tell him that James Wade is dying, and craves his pity and help in his hour of need. And you," she turned graciously to her somber-faced visitor, "you can go back to your husband's side, my friend. I know what pain it is to leave him in such sore straits. Tell him the priest will come to him as speedily as is possible from the wilderness to which he hath been driven. May God deal with you as you deal with His servant."

"So be it," said Deborah Wade, solemnly. "I pledge my word, my honor, I would pledge my life if I could, for his safety. But lest there be curious eyes watching even in the darkness, it will be wise for him to come disguised. I told my people at Fair Oaks that I was going out to seek an old Indian medicine man, skilled in the use of herbs and simples unknown to us. If—if—" the speaker hesitated.

"Our good Father will come as the Indian doctor then," said Madame Ventnor, catching the unspoken thought.

"There will be no danger then, none," said the woman with almost a sob of relief. "May your God bless and reward you, Madame," and, bending down, she lifted the lady's dainty little hand to her lips. "For myself, I have no creed save that of wifely love and faith to him who, whatsoever his sin or shame, hath been ever a kind lord and master to me."

"Poor creature!" said Madame Ventnor, pityingly, as her

visitor left the room. "Who can look for soul or spirit in a wife who is bought like a chattel for so much tobacco? It was thus I have heard James Wade bought her from the ship-master, who brought her from God knows where, beyond the sea. It speaks in the man's favor that he has treated her well, even though rumor hath it that she is a Jewess, and in secret practices her hated faith."

"A Jewess! ay, I well remember having heard it too. A Jewess with a renegade husband," said Giles. "Truly, it is into the devil's jaws our good Father will venture at your bidding, mother. I tell you I like not my mission. Let the dog die as he has lived. Mother! mother! have you forgotten the woe this robber of Kent and his minions have wreaked upon holy Church? And what was it we heard only last week, that the Puritans in the north had done to the holy martyr, Father Edwards, when he fell into their hands?"

"Hush! hush!" said his mother, flashing up into sudden passion. "I must not think of these things now. I dare not. Giles! Giles! do you not see that it is against my own will I am forced to hear this woman's cry? You must go; go in God's name, Giles; I command it! Take the canoe, and Chico for oarsman, if you need help. But come, you have been out since noon-day, and must have supper first. It had been served full an hour."

The little lady, who was a charming combination of Christian faith, worldly wisdom, and womanly tenderness, put her arm on her son's and led the way across the hall into the great dining-room of Avalon, where a dozen tapers burning in silver sconces could only chase the shadows into the corners, and make a circle

around the mahogany table with its quaint service of Canton china and family plate.

Madame Mélanie Ventnor, who had moved, a radiant presence, in two of the most splendid courts of Europe, still maintained the dignity of a noble lady even in this far off Colonial home; she tolerated no rude repasts served in boorish haste.

With bowed head and clasped hands, Giles said in Latin the grace taught by Father Maurice, and then proceeded to enjoy his supper with the appetite of a healthy boy who had been boating for six hours without any modern methods of refreshment.

And, indeed, a nineteenth century boy could have found little fault with this supper of two hundred and fifty years ago. True, tea and coffee, rarities at that period even in Europe, had not yet found their way across the Atlantic, but pitchers of rich, foaming milk, sweet cider, and home brewed ale flanked the chicken, pastry, the great round of spiced beef, the ruddy home-cured ham. There were a golden loaf of Indian pone, dainty cakes of wheaten flour, while luscious honey and toothsome conserves, made after one of the recipes Madame Mélanie had brought from her French home, really left nothing for a hungry boy to desire.

Giles' mood, which we must confess was not an amiable one when he sat down to this repast, gradually softened, as in all centuries masculine moods do, under the soothing influence of such good cheer.

A deft-handed negro boy waited on the table with grave formality, for Madame Mélanie Ventnor demanded respectful service on all occasions, however informal.

A charming picture it was that the tall myrtleberry tapers illumined. Despite her forty years, Madame Ventnor still re-

tained much of the grace and vivacity of the beautiful *Mélanie Marquette*, and though the dark hair rolled under her widow's coil was sprinkled with silver, and the roses had faded in the ivory-tinted cheeks, her eyes could flash and sparkle still with all their old fire, and her slender little figure had the same stately poise as when she trod the minuet twenty-five years before with England's hapless King.

Giles, though of sturdy English build, had the same dark eyes, the same rich hair that, like the loyal young Cavalier he was, he wore in curling locks down upon his neck; while his close-fitting jerkin of blue homespun cloth showed that he would not shame the stalwart race of athletes from which he sprang.

But fairest of all was little maid Margot, with her snowy skin, her floating golden hair, her deep violet eyes, clear as the forest lakes—little maid Margot, who had neither the ruddy strength of her English father nor the flashing brilliancy of her French mother, but a strange, pure beauty all her own. "The Lily of Avalon" she was called by the friendly Indian neighbors, who looked upon the dazzling fairness of her skin and hair as a mark of especial benediction from heaven, and felt that little maid Margot was closely akin to the angels of whom Father Maurice taught.

Since the death of their father and the banishment of the good priest, who had been their friend and tutor, the mother and her children had been closer companions than was usual at a time when family discipline inspired young people with wholesome respect rather than confiding affection. So while doing full justice to the good things before them, Giles and Margot recounted to their mother all that they had seen and heard in

their afternoon's outing, how they had sailed to St. George's Point, before the wind had failed them, and seen the great merchantman, the *Golden Lion*, passing up on her way to Annapolis, or, as it was at that time called by its Puritan settlers, Providence.

"There were two cannon on her deck," said Giles, "and there are rumors that she hath brought messages of weight from England, for there were passengers landed at St. Mary's City who claimed audience with the Governor at once. I heard anxious talking down at St. George's wharf. Some say that the Lord Proprietor hath been deprived of all right and powers in the province, and we are to be under Clayborne's rule."

"Nay, then Heaven forbid!" said Madame Ventnor, excitedly. "Our kinsman Cecilius hath borne himself so prudently during these terrible times that his name hath been a shield to my widowhood and your orphanhood."

"I like not such double-faced shields," outspoke the young master of Avalon. "Surely, with the province he claims to rule, harried by robbers and traitors, it is time for a knight and noble to speak and act boldly, despite the new Lord Cromwell and his long-eared crew."

"Aye, and lose his head boldly, as his King and master did," said Madame Ventnor, sharply. "It is well for thee that our kinsman hath the serpent's wisdom, or, like Fair Oaks and Shorebanks, Avalon would change masters right speedily."

"Nay," said Giles; "there were other rumors at the wharf which did not savor of serpent wisdom. There were those who said that the Leopard had shaken himself and risen in his wrath to hold his own," and the boy nodded significantly to the tall chimney-place above which hung the grant of Avalon

Manor, signed by Cecilius Calvert, Lord Baltimore, and sealed with his crest, two leopards supporting a central shield bearing the cross and cap of a Lord Palatinate.

"God protect us, for we know not in these days what an hour will bring forth," said Madame Ventnor, anxiously. "It is a sore strait for a lone woman to be, without friend or counselor. I am loath to send you away with all these troubling rumors abroad."

"Then I will stay," said Giles, quickly.

"And let me lie to the dying," flashed out his mother, her dark eyes ablaze. "Did you not hear me pass my word? It must be kept, though this whole province rises in turmoil of arms. So bestir yourself, Giles, for the moments are passing. And, Margot, see that he hath a basket with wine and food for the good Fathers, who, I doubt not, are in sore need. And put in a bottle of the cordial which was sent to us from France last year; it is a wonderful elixir to uphold the weak body, as I have proved. Be quick! be quick!" and with nervous energy this brave little Colonial dame of long ago hurried Giles on his mission, even while she trembled to see him go; for those were heroic times when faith was strong, stronger than wisdom, or prudence or fear, stronger even than love or death.

CHAPTER III.

AT THE CALL OF DUTY.

THUS urgently pressed, the young master of Avalon hastened forth, sorely against his will, on his mission. The night had fallen clear and peaceful, as the canoe, impelled by the light, skilful strokes of the slender Indian boy who held the oars, shot off from the little wharf of Avalon, as noiselessly as a water fowl darting down the stream. The Indian, Chico, Giles' foster-brother, had been his playmate and companion from infancy.

The beautiful bride of the senior Giles Ventnor, bred in the luxurious atmosphere of courts, had drooped sadly when first transplanted to the rugged open of the New World. Her first two children had died a few months after birth; so when young Giles came, his father had gone up into the Indian settlement to seek a foster-mother for his boy. At his bidding Nona, regal, stately—a princess of the Algonquin race, but widowed since a late skirmish of hostile tribes, had come with her own infant boy to Avalon Manor.

She was soon as passionately devoted to her "palefaced" charge as if he were her own, and treated him accordingly. Giles' nursing was conducted according to methods that proved a series of shocks to his European parents. He was tied up in trees, plunged into ponds, buried in mud, let loose in snow, in short,

subjected to all the heroic measures that went to the making of an Algonquin "brave."

Strange to say, the young Anglo-Norman came through it all as stalwart and lusty a boy as ever delighted a father's heart. A "Strong-Arm" (as he was called by his Indian playmates, from the family crest carved above his door), who bade fair to maintain all the sturdy traditions of his race.

But Madame Ventnor had seen enough of Indian nursing; so when, two years after her brother, little Margot was born, she was committed to gentler keeping, and Nona returned to her people, while her boy, Chico, led a double life between his home and Avalon—savagery and civilization.

"Let us cross to St. Catherine's, Chico," said Giles. "Father Maurice was there yesterday, I know, for I saw his signal fluttering from the rock. Though if I had a red-skin conscience like yours, Chico, I would risk six months' penance rather than go near him to-night."

"Has Strong-Arm sinned so greatly that he must go out thus in the darkness for pardon?" asked Chico, on whom certain central truths of Christianity had been, with great labor, deeply impressed.

"Not I," answered Giles, laughing. "My own sins set far too lightly on me, I fear, Chico. But that reprobate, James Wade, is lying ill unto death at Fair Oaks Manor, and would have the devil's clutch loosed on his soul before he goes. His wife hath so worked on my lady mother's heart that she sends us to beguile the good Father into what, I fear me, is a Roundhead trap, where he is like to lose ears or tongue, if not head outright."

Chico stopped rowing and rested on his oars in blank amazement.

"And Strong-Arm goes to trap his black-robe Father!" he exclaimed.

"Nay; scarce that, I hope," answered Giles, "for Mistress Wade has pledged her word that he will go safe."

"Ouf! A squaw's word!" grunted Chico, scornfully.

"And my mother," continued Giles, "has commanded that I go."

"Ouf!" again interrupted Chico. "The acorn that has grown with Strong-Arm is a tree the wind can not bend. Is my brother still a child to be ruled by squaws? Let us go spear fish in the deep waters below, and leave the black-robe Father to sleep in peace."

Evidently Chico's penance of two years gone had not produced any very lasting impression, and it must be confessed that Giles' eyes for a moment flashed responsive to this almost overpowering temptation.

Was he not sixteen, of man's strength and stature, and master of Avalon as well? Why should he, sorely against his will and judgment, be guided by women's fears and prayers, and lead his friend, the Father, into perhaps deadly peril, merely to give hope and comfort to a reprobate like James Wade? So, perplexed between faith and prudence, Giles hesitated, while the boat drifted with the current and Chico waited the word to turn its course to the broader waters of the bay.

But the training of years conquered, for this young Colonial lord had been taught from childhood the obedience which Chico's savage nature could never learn.

"It can not be, Chico," he said, with an effort. "My mother has given her word, and I must honor it; we must go to St. Catherine's."

And as argument was not in Chico's line, he simply bent to his oars and the boat shot across the stream to the little island that nestled close to the Virginia shore. There was no sound or sign of life in the steep, rocky, vine-draped banks, that rose abruptly from the river, but as the canoe neared the island, Giles put his finger to his lips and made a curious call, like that of a night bird to its mate.

Two, three times the cry was repeated, but there was no answer.

"Good," said Chico, "they are gone. The Great Spirit has warned them to fly from the danger to come. My mother, too, has seen it in her dreams."

"Has seen what?" asked Giles.

"The blood-red cloud that is rising on the hills of Poto-mac," answered Chico, as he steadied his boat under St. Catherine's shore. "It touched the wall and roof of Avalon, until they burned like fire, and she heard the war cry of the pale-faces, and your voice was in it, Strong-Arm, and the weeping of their women, and your mother was among them—all these things has Nona seen in her dreams, and so it is that I am here at my white brother's side."

"Then Nona sent you," said Giles, laughing. "I wondered what chance brought you this week to Avalon, Chico; truly, I thought you would escape the spring planting, for I know you are not fond of work."

"My fathers were great hunters, chiefs, and kings," said

Chico, proudly. "Why must I dig like a squaw, that the pale-faces may eat corn? But Chico would die for his brother, Strong-Arm," added the boy with simple gravity.

"I believe it," said Giles. "Never will I forget the day you stood between me and the wild cat, Chico, and you scarcely counted eight summers then. I am sure you would do as much for me now. But we are forgetting our mission. The good Fathers can not be far, I fear. Let us try the cave where we had Mass on Easter day. If by good luck they are not there, we can go back to my mother with clear conscience and say they can not be found."

Again Chico bent to his oars, and the canoe glided along under the shadow of the steep, rugged banks, until it reached a little cove, where, running their boat up on a bit of shelving sand, the two lads leaped ashore and bounded up the rocks, to a spot where an apparent hollow or crevice was choked with a tangle of vines and undergrowth. Thrusting these aside, Giles uncovered a low, irregular opening, into which, with some difficulty, they forced an entrance.

"*Benedicite*, my children, whether you come in love or hate," said a low, clear voice. Springing forward a foot or two, in the darkness, the boys stood in the cave of St. Catherine's, before Father Maurice.

The rocky vault into which they had penetrated rose to the height of about eight feet, and stretched on every side into impenetrable shadow, except where the flame of a pine torch thrust into a crevice of the rocks made a circle of flickering light. Beneath it was a broad, flat ledge, covered with a white linen cloth, on which was a crucifix, with two of the myrtleberry tapers and

candlesticks from Avalon Manor. Before this rude altar stood the tall, wasted form of the hunted missionary, who had evidently just started up from a pallet of dried moss and rushes near by.

"Giles! Chico! my dear sons! God bless you! bless you!" he repeated, as the boys knelt at his feet. "What brings you here at such an hour? What has happened at Avalon? No evil, God grant."

"None, none, dear Father," said Giles, hastily noting that Father Maurice's voice was tremulous. "We startled you too rudely, I fear, but we scarce expected to find you here, for we gave the call on the shore below and there came no answer."

"I did not hear it," replied the priest. "I was sleeping heavily, for to tell the truth, I have been ill for several days and unable to leave our lodgings, which are not of the most healthful, as you see," he added with a smile. "I had taken a draught to-night which I hoped would drive the fever from my veins; it made me sleep."

"And Father Leonard—is he not with you?"

"No," answered Father Maurice. "He had a call yestereven to one of our poor Indians dying in Potopaco."

"Then Heaven be thanked my mission is in vain," said Giles, impulsively. "Lie down again and rest, Father. Chico, where is the basket mother sent with wine and food? Let me pour you a little of the cordial sent to us last year from France, Father; it will give you life and strength."

"Nay, not now, my son, not now, for the fever burns yet and the cordial would but add fuel to its flame. But I will rest again as you say, for I am weak and a bit tremulous." The speaker sank back upon the pallet in a half recumbent attitude,

supporting his head upon his hand, but still smiling kindly upon his young companions. "So tremulous last night, Giles, that I thought the burden of the flesh was falling from me and the spirit would soon be free."

"God forbid," exclaimed Giles, as he knelt beside his old tutor's couch and surveyed the thin, fever-flushed face anxiously. "It is little wonder the ague has seized you in a hole like this—a murrain on the beasts that have hunted you to it."

"My son, my son," interrupted the priest, reprovingly.

"Nay, Father, I must speak or choke, so doth my hot blood boil," continued Giles, impetuously. "And to think of that craven cur, James Wade, howling for you on his death-bed after driving you to this!"

"What is it you say?" asked Father Maurice, starting. "James Wade near to death, and—and calling for me!"

"Aye, that he is," answered Giles, fiercely triumphant in what he felt was righteous judgment on the good Father's enemies. "His wife came to my mother this evening, beseeching her to send the priest to save him from the fiends that were already tormenting him, and it was for this I was bidden to seek you, sorely against my will. Now he must die in his sins, as he well deserves, for the hand of God keeps you here."

"Nay, nay," said Father Maurice. "God's hand would not keep me from a soul in peril. I must go to him. I must go!"

"Father, no! no!" said Giles, dismayed. "Oh, you can not! you can not! The fever is rioting in your veins, palsying your limbs; you do not know what you say. James Wade is full fifteen miles from here at Fair Oaks Manor, and, and," as the priest tottered back on his couch—"you can not even stand."

"I must, I *will*!" was the low reply. "The cordial, Giles, the cordial your mother sent me—fill—me—a cup—a—generous—draught."

"O Father, no!" pleaded Giles, almost sobbing. "Did you not say it would fire the fever that is already burning you? It will be death, death, and for the sake of a traitor dog who may be only plotting to betray you."

"The draught! the cordial, my son; what is death to me? Is it not my duty to die for the perishing souls for whom my Master shed His blood? In God's name—the—cordial, Giles!"

The words came with a solemnity the boy dared not ignore. He took flask and cup from the basket Chico had brought and poured the draught for Father Maurice, who, making the sign of the cross, lifted it with trembling hand to his lips.

"So," he said, as he drained it—"lend me your hand for a moment, and help me to my feet. Ah, my Strong-Arm, what it is to have youth and health and strength to serve your God! I feel better already. It is a wondrous elixir the good Fathers brew in their Mountain Abbey; truly it seems the vigor of returning life. God grant that it may sustain me for my night's work. Lead on, my children, lead on to the boat. But first, Giles, lift that stone. The holy oils are hidden in a casket below. Give it to me, my son, that the poor, trembling sinner may be anointed in the name of the Lord, even though I may not bear him the Bread of Life. Poor James Wade. God be praised that his heart is touched at the last. God be praised!"

And with the *Laudate* on his lips Father Maurice turned with tottering steps from the cave.

CHAPTER IV.

A NIGHT ALARM.

MARGOT had stood at the great hall door and watched her brother until he disappeared under the shadow of the oaks, and then, with a little sigh, she turned back into her mother's sitting-room, where Madame Ventnor was already half repenting of the boys' mission.

"A pair of young scatterbrains to send off on such a quest. God knows, whether I have done right or wrong. 'Twould be Father Maurice's wish I know, but Father Maurice is a saint, with his heart in heaven. It behooves those who love him to keep his head on earth while we can. Margot, Margot, if you had not turned on me those eyes, so like your holy aunt, Sœur Clothilde, I would have held to your brother's advice, which was of the manly wisdom, befitting mere creatures who have to battle in a world of sin."

"Nay, you did well to let them go, dear mother," said Margot, simply.

"I am not sure, I am not sure," said the lady, tapping her slippered foot nervously on the hearthstone where she stood. "Truly, a poor woman is surely straitened who is without male friend or counselor in troubled times like these. Ah! Margot, my little Margot, when I think what Mélanie Marquette was, at your years, without care or thought or fear, I could weep for the clouds under which you must bloom, my poor little forest flower."

"The forest is sweet to me, for I have known naught else," said Margot, gently. "It is different for you, dear mother, for you have seen the splendor of courts and kings."

"True, little one," said Madame Ventnor, as with a deep sigh she sank down in the high-backed chair before the fire. "But the splendor of courts and kings is but passing vanity as, alas! I know too well. This New World is happy to be well free from it, as your father was wont to say to me. Nay, he had even stranger thoughts. I have heard him say the ties that bound this New World to the Old were too frail and far to hold, and America would break away in its growing strength and become the mightiest empire the world has yet seen."

"And then we shall have court and king here. I hope that I shall see that time," said Margot, eagerly. "And Giles will be an earl, and will wear doublet of velvet gay with gold embroidery, and I—I will have a satin gown, furred and ruffled, like that you wore at the great wedding-feast of your Princess to King Charles."

"God rest him in his bloody grave, and God pity her in her woeful exile!" murmured Madame Ventnor, brokenly. "Such sorrow has come on the chief merry makers of that glad scene, Margot, that I can but feel your sweet Aunt Clothilde was wise as well as holy, when she turned from the wooings of a prince to the cloister of Annécý. There were none fairer among all the high-born maidens of the court, none of a gayer heart or merrier voice or lighter step, yet when the grave glance of the saintly Francis de Sales fell upon her he said to our mother: 'Madame, 'tis a lily for the good God's garden—not for the banner of France.' And so it proved, for within the year she was with Madame de Chantal in the little house at Annécý, while poor

mamma was left with all her fine air-castles in the dust, and only little me, a prickly rose, in place of her royal white lily. But hark! What is that without?" and the little mistress of Avalon started up in the midst of her sweet reminiscences with a blanching face. "The tramp of many horses, Margot! God grant no harm may have come to your brother!"

"Mother dear, no! no!" said Margot, flinging her arm around her mother's trembling form. "Giles must be far across the river, as they come from the hills."

"But at this hour and in such numbers," said the lady. "Back! back!" she continued, as a dozen or more excited servants, black and white, came flying in terror to her room; "back to the hall—hold the doors and windows fast until we find whether those without be friends or foes. Back, I say, ye fools! and get your firearms. David! Otto! Richard! hand down the powder horns!"

"Open!" called a harsh voice without, rising above the din of heavy footsteps and the clanking of spurs on the stones of the colonnade. "Open in the name of the Lord Protector."

"Never!" answered Madame Ventnor to the frightened group around her. "Keep down the bars, Harvey—Avalon knows no Lord Protector. He is traitor and the King's murderer. We are loyal subjects of his majesty, King Charles, whom God guide to his own!"

"Lady, dear lady," said Harvey, the old "redemptioneer," who had been steward at Avalon for more than fifteen years, "do not anger them. There are two score armed men."

"I care not if there are two hundred," was the fierce answer. "Think you, old man, that Avalon is a hostelry to be opened at

the bidding of any rude clowns who crave lodging or food? Keep the bars down. The walls are strong."

"But Giles! Giles is beyond them," sobbed little Margot. "Mother, dear mother, speak these men fair, or they may do harm to Giles."

"Giles!" the color blanched in the mother's flushed cheeks, the hot, defiant words died on her lips. "I forgot," she gasped, "I forgot my boy! We must feign courtesy for his sake. Open the doors, Harvey."

The great bars fell, the heavy door swung open, the night wind swept in a gust that made the hall lamp flare and smoke. Half a dozen men, booted and spurred, pressed over the broad threshold and then fell awkwardly back at sight of the haughty, dainty little lady who had stepped forward to meet them with a stately grace which compelled respect.

"Welcome, gentlemen," and a fine note of scorn thrilled under her courteous words. "Though it becomes me to recall to you that this is a widowed home and should be sacred from intrusion at so late an hour."

"We come on business that can not wait on courtesy, Madame," said the leader, a tall, hard-featured man who had stepped boldly into the hall, undaunted by its mistress' lofty bearing. "There is new trouble around, as you doubtless have heard."

"Nay, nothing but scant rumors," said Madame Ventnor, with ill-concealed anxiety. "I am a widow and live apart from the tumult of men. What new evil hath come upon our unhappy times?"

"Your kinsman, Lord Baltimore, has thought it best to foment discord in this province, which the Commissioners had happily

reduced to peace and submission," continued the other, in a harsh, strident voice that rang ominously through the hall. "His messenger arrived to-day in the good ship *Golden Lion*, and already half the province is in armed rebellion. Knowing that this *Avalon Manor* would be in all likelihood a stronghold of the recusants, Captain William Clayborne hath commissioned us to seize and hold it until such time as the province may be once more reduced to submission to lawful authority."

"Lawful authority!" echoed Madame Ventnor, bursting into the passion which great ladies of that time were wont often to betray in stronger words than belong to our modern speech. "Why, you braying fool, by what lawful authority can you take possession of my home?"

"By authority of the Commissioners appointed by the Lord Protector Cromwell," the intruder continued, in the harsh, nasal tone that fell in maddening discord on his listeners' ears. "And lest in his youth and ignorance he be seduced by the evil spirit now stirring in the province, we are warranted by the same authority to take under our care Giles Ventnor, the young heir and master of *Avalon*, and deliver him at *Kent Manor* into the guardianship of Captain William Clayborne."

Madame Ventnor had paled and flushed and paled again during this address, which had been delivered with a passionless calm that seemed to admit of no remonstrance. She felt she might as well argue with the harsh, creaking iron bolt of a dungeon door.

For the first time in all her stately, beautiful life, she felt the pitiless touch of power, and her proud spirit rose in fierce, wild rebellion at its mastery.

"Rather would I see my son dead than committed to such guardianship," she blazed forth. "Well do I understand the malignance with which Clayborne of Kent pursues me and mine, now that the power of my kinsman fails to protect us. For twenty years this master of Kent hath had grudge against Mélanie Ventnor, and has waited with cold-blooded malice for this time when he could wrest from me both home and child. May God's curse fall upon him!" she went on passionately.

"Profane not the Lord's name, unhappy woman," sternly interrupted the Puritan. "No wrong is intended to thee or thine. We would but leave a guard in this house, lest the malcontents seize it for a vantage point upon the river, and we would commit thy son to proper guardianship, lest in these times of peril he lose perchance both life and heritage. For the sword of the Lord is bared for the smiting. The Babylon that hath fallen in the Old World must not rise in the New. Therefore, it be- seems thee to accept that which is ordained and give the boy into our keeping."

"Never!" repeated Madame Ventnor, with flashing eyes. "Thank Heaven, which hath removed him from your evil reach. My boy is far from here."

"That we must learn for ourselves," was the grim answer. "Jarvis, Grey, come with me to search this Popish den. And watch without, my men, lest the young Babylonite make a leap from roof or window."

And then the tramp of rude feet, the din of clanking spurs, and hoarse voices rang through hall, and up stairway, and into chamber, as the searchers called to one another through the stately spaces of the house, thrusting lanterns into corridors and under

archways, flinging aside curtain and cover, while the proud mistress of haughty Avalon stood with white face and blazing eyes among her servants, helpless to avert this profanation of her home.

"Mother, sweet mother, you look so pale and strange," whispered little Margot, plucking at her gown. "Come into your own room and rest."

"Aye, come, dear lady," added the two white maids, Jane and Cicely, who were trembling with fear. "We will shut out these rude voices and make you a sleeping posset."

"Rest! sleep! with these caitiffs in my home?" exclaimed the little lady, passionately. "No; we will leave, this very hour, this very moment! Since Avalon has been seized by a robber band, I have no place here. Harvey, David, go out to the stables, order mules and pillions, that with my daughter and our women we can seek refuge and safety at St. Mary's."

"You have safety here," said the leader of the band, as he came down the stairs after his unsuccessful search. "We do not war with women or children. Retire where you will, and sleep in peace. Ten of my men will remain here to guard the place. We claim shelter and food for them, and provender for our horses, that is all. But there shall be no passing to and from this house to hold converse with the enemy who are gathering in the hills beyond, and who have already rifled the records of the province to-night from the manor house of Richard Preston on the Patuxent, and wantonly destroyed the arms and ammunition stored in his magazines. You may not leave the house, but you will be sheltered here in all safety and honor."

"Words, words!" exclaimed Madame Ventnor. "False, lying

words! You would tell me that I am prisoner, held captive here in my own house at William Clayborne's will?"

"So hath the Lord decreed," was the grim answer, and at that relentless tone the little lady broke down into despairing tears, and was led by her trembling maids into her own apartment, while Margot sobbed in terror at her side.

CHAPTER V.

THE MISSIONARY.

MEANWHILE, unconscious of the fate that had fallen upon his home, Giles was skimming swiftly down the river in the little canoe on his errand of pity and charity. There was no doubt or hesitation now, for weak and wasted as he was, Father Maurice had taken command, and to him his Master's business admitted of no delay.

A fresh breeze swept up from the bay, broad and calm the great river stretched under the arching, starlit sky, while the dim forest-clad banks lay hushed in a sweet, solemn silence, that seemed to breathe the very blessedness of peace.

"The Land of the Sanctuary," said Father Maurice, softly. "It was thus we called these beautiful shores when first, with prayer and praise, we consecrated them to God and Our Lady. The Land of the Sanctuary, where all should be welcome in God's name, to live in brotherly love and harmony."

"And well have these craven Puritans repaid your grace," said Giles, grimly. "I do not know where our kinsman Calvert's wise head was, when he opened his fold to these ravening wolves. It is a burning shame," continued the boy, hotly. "There is neither stout heart nor hand left in the land. Our people are cowed and driven like frightened sheep by this Clayborne and

his robber crew. Ah, if Strong-Arm of Avalon were not a beardless boy he would make himself heard and felt!"

"Nay, patience, my hot-head," said the priest, gently. "Not by man's ways doth God work. Whirlwind and earthquake do His will, and shape His ends—even as the kindly dew and sunbeam and shower. Birth and change and growth, these can not be without throe and travail, as you would know, my Strong-Arm, if you had given less thought to sport, and more to your books of history. And this fair world, which God has opened like a new paradise to sinful man, can not escape the universal law. Through pain and turmoil and bloodshed must this last-born of nations work out its great destiny.

"A strange dream came to me last night," continued Father Maurice, with a grave smile. "Doubtless it was the fever burning in my veins and firing my sick brain, that made it seem clear as a prophetic vision.

"I thought I stood on the rock of St. Catherine's, looking to the land, and, springing from the sea even to the sky, were the mighty pillars and arches of a vast gateway, through which thronged a great, rejoicing multitude, that seemed to be of all nations, all creeds, all climes.

"*'In exitu Israel,'* they sang, and the great organ-swell of the sea seemed to upbear their voices. And as they pressed forward to the golden western shores other multitudes came behind them in unending ranks.

"And while I looked in wonder my vision lengthened. (I had been medicining myself with this new powder, which our Fathers have brought of late from South America, and it sometimes causes strange fancies of eye and ear.) I saw the land

before me stretching into infinite distance of forest and vale and meadow, but, as the multitude pressed forward, it changed, like the darkened wave changes at sunrise, and the fields waved with golden harvests, the rivers were white with ships, and on every side rose cities of such splendor and glory as had never met my wakened eye. And everywhere by the riverside, in the valleys, and over the cities, flashed the cross, while the unending throng pressed on, and the land brightened at their touch, until the glory, as of sunset, was lost in the distance.

"Then suddenly I awoke, shivering and burning, a poor, hunted missionary, in the damp, dark cave of St. Catherine's, with only the wilderness around me, and the glory of the vision gone"—

"The Black Robe saw what is to come," said Chico, who had been resting on his oars and listening eagerly to the Father's words. "It is so to the wise men of my tribe that the Great Spirit speaks in dreams. Long before the white man's foot touched the shores of the Potomac my mother Nona's father's father sang in his death song of the pale-faced strangers that were to come, rushing in like the white-topped waves before the storm. He saw the deer and elk and buffalo flying before them, and the wigwams of his people fall, and the tribes blow away like red leaves in the wind. So it was the father of Nona's father sang when the Susquehannah had bound him to the stake and the fire was eating his heart, and he died like a chief and made no sign."

"Ah, Chico, Chico," said Father Maurice, shaking his head. "I had forgotten you for the moment, or I would have said naught of dream or fever-fancy, which have far too much weight with your untaught spirit. It is not for man to unveil the

future, which belongs only to the justice and judgment of God. It is for us but to take, one by one, the duties of the present and to fulfil each as best we can.

"Bend to your right oar, Giles. We must keep to midstream here, for there may be unfriendly watchers at Houston's Point. I have heard that the fishermen of late settled there are bitter in word and deed against our holy Church. Look to the hills beyond, Giles. Your eyes are younger than mine. Is that a beacon flaming there?"

"Aye, that it is," answered Giles, as he saw a tongue of flame leaping up from a wooded crest at the bend of the stream, "and there is another, and another. Now, God grant that this may mean there is brave work afoot! There were rumors on the waterside this evening that Lord Baltimore had sent a special messenger to the Governor, bidding him call the province to arms against the Puritan tyrants who would press their yoke upon us. Father, let us put into shore and see," pleaded the boy, excitedly.

"No! no!" answered Father Maurice. "You forget our mission. We are still five miles from Fair Oaks Manor. Keep to your oars, my sons, in Heaven's name, for the cordial will lend me but brief strength and the moments are fleeting. God grant we may not be too late even now."

But though Giles rowed on vigorously in obedience to the voice he had been taught to revere, it was with a distracted mind and eye.

"Father, see, the answering beacons come from Linganore and Redwood. The Governor is abiding there now. His wife, our cousin Verlinda, hath been fierce enough against these Round-

heads to stir the province, even against her husband's word and will. Truly, if this mean battle it will delight her heart, and I wager that Gerard and Mark have their arms on hand already, though they are no older than I am. But mother will hold me back, I know; her heart has weakened under its widowhood."

"Which is but natural, my son," answered Father Maurice, gently. "Remember Our Lord made even death yield back the widow's son. If these signals mean new tumults of battle, your place is not with armed men in conflict for right, but at your mother's side, to support and defend her helpless womanhood. At last, thank God! There is Fair Oaks," added the speaker, with a sigh of relief. "Turn to the shore, my sons, where you see yon light. I think it is burning there to guide us."

At the priest's bidding the boat turned sharply toward a steep, wooded bluff, that jutted out into the stream.

A glimmer of light, broad, stretching upon its crest, showed the outlines of the great Fair Oaks Manor, granted by the first Lord Baltimore to his friend, Sir Armand de Vere. But in the late troubled years, bluff, outspoken Sir Armand, with his son fighting under the King's banner at Worcester, and his loyal heart fiery with love, hate, and grief, had been a broad mark for the vengeance and cupidity of the conquerors. His lands had been confiscated, and he and his family compelled to seek refuge in the French settlements of Canada, while his stately manor was placed in the holding of James Wade, as a reward of "faithful service to the Commonwealth."

As the canoe drew near to the wooded banks of the de Veres' lost inheritance, Giles saw the guiding light was a lantern waved

by a girl, who stood midway up the bluff, screened by a projecting ledge of rock from any watchers above.

When the boat touched the shore she came bounding breathlessly down the height, her long black hair flying and her gay silken scarf fluttering in the wind.

"It is the girl, Judith Wade," said Giles, gazing with no friendly eyes on the elfin-looking little creature who was speeding to meet them. "They say she is unbaptized, and strange both in word and way. In God's name, Father, do not trust her."

"Nay, poor child, what harm can she do? Rather should she fear for herself at this late hour, when it is most unseemly for either woman or child to be abroad alone."

"Stop!" called the girl, imperiously, as, wrapped in the Indian blanket that Giles had brought him for disguise, Father Maurice stepped from the boat. "You must not land here. My mother sends me to tell you that she can not keep the pledge of safety she has given you. The Manor is filled with armed men."

"They will not harm the medicine man who comes to help and cure," said Father Maurice.

"You are no medicine man, but the Christian's priest," was the quick reply. "My father, in his fever's madness, called for you. I know it all," she continued, sharply.

"He lives still?" asked the Father, anxiously.

"Yes," she answered; "but so feebly that he scarce can speak my name. And Captain Clayborne has sent men to guard the house, for the Governor has called for fighting men and horses and boats, and there is to be war, my mother says, and she can not save you if you try to enter Fair Oaks now. You must even go back as you came, and right quickly, too, for if these men here

lay hands upon you it will not be a gentle hold. So my mother bade me say to you, so that she might redeem the word to which she had sworn."

"And your father, your poor, poor father! Nay, child, I must go to him."

"What good can you do to him?" asked the girl, her voice breaking. "He has had three doctors, and they say he must die—to-night! Are you better than three doctors?"

"I can give help and comfort of which they do not know," answered Father Maurice. "Go back to your mother, child. Tell her I am waiting out here in the darkness, willing to risk everything, even life itself, to spend one half hour at your father's side."

"Do you know what the soldiers would do to you?" asked the girl, flashing a look of inquiry at the tall form of the missionary. "My mother told me, so that I would have courage to come out here in the dark and warn you—she says they would bore your tongue with red-hot iron, and cut off your ears, aye, and, mayhap, your head. For they are swearing over their ale cups, in the Manor hall, that it is the priests who have made the people rise and fight, and they will not leave one alive in the province after to-night."

"We can die but once, my child. Go to your mother with my message."

"Father," pleaded Giles, "have you no other children? Are there no hearts or souls to be thought of but this wretched man's?"

"The good Shepherd left the ninety-nine in the fold to find the one that was lost, my son," was the grave answer.

The girl meantime had not moved. With the lantern swinging

from her hand, her black hair blowing about her elfin face, she stood looking at this tall, grave-voiced stranger, whose tone carried conviction, and who was willing to risk torture and death to reach her father's side.

"There is a way," she said suddenly, her black eyes flashing, "if we can follow it. Last year I came upon the entrance when I was hunting my pet fawn which the dogs had chased into hiding. And old Martin, who was forester to the de Veres, told me the passage led under the earth up to the stone stairway of the gable chamber. He was too lame to show me the way."

"A secret passage!" said Father Maurice, who knew that many of the manors were thus provided with hidden escapes to the river. "Now, indeed, is God opening a way to my prayers. Show me the place, child. If I know aught of these secret ways we can pass into the very heart of the house, unseen and unquestioned. Stay you here, my sons," he added, turning to Giles and Chico. "Keep your boat well in the shadows, and wait my return. If I am not back within two hours, risk no longer delay, but row quickly back to Avalon, and leave me—in my Master's keeping. So good-by, and God bless you," and Father Maurice laid his hands in benediction on the two young heads, then turned away where Judith's lantern was already flashing like a will-o'-the-wisp over the vinegrown rocks that guarded the shore.

For a moment Giles—big, hot-headed, hot-hearted boy that he was—sat breathless and bewildered, almost choking as it seemed with grief and wrath, and helpless to protest against this heroic self-sacrifice.

Then he sprang to his feet. "Chico," he whispered, "guard the boat and keep watch. No word of living man can hold me

here to-night. I must follow the Father into that hole or death-trap or whatever it be, into which that witch girl is leading him."

"I will go with my brother," said Chico, calmly.

"No, no, *no*," said Giles. "One of us must guard the boat, for we are likely to need it sorely if we ever escape from this snare—of which there seems small chance. Did you note the Father's voice and walk? Already the strength of the cordial is failing him. I must follow to help and to save him, aye, for the first time in my life, against his word and will."

CHAPTER VI.

THROUGH DARKENED WAYS.

JUDITH's lantern had seemingly danced along the shore until she reached a spot where the bluff arose precipitously for about seventy feet from the river that swept deep and strong at its feet, leaving only a narrow ledge of rock as foothold between wave and cliff. But nature, gracious even in her strength in this smiling land, had flung drapery of vines and moss and all manner of clinging greenery over these stern escarpments.

Pushing aside a mass of curtaining vine, Father Maurice's young guide showed him a narrow opening in the rock through which came a draught, icy cold and heavy with damp, earthen odors, as the breath from a tomb.

"This is the place," she said. "Martin told me that he knew it well, and but for his lame leg would have guided me through it to the stone staircase in the west gable of the Manor. But he bade me never to venture the passage myself, nor to show it to any one, lest it be used by evil men for evil deeds."

"It will serve only good purpose to-night, my child. But there may be perils or pitfalls in the way which it is not fitting you should brave. So go back to your mother by the open path beneath the stars. Tell her how I am coming to your father's aid, and bid her meet me as best she can. Happily it is near midnight, and the guards may be sleeping."

"And you do not fear to go into that horrible darkness alone?" asked the girl, with a shudder of recoil from the black opening.

"No; for God is in the darkness as well as the light. Lend me your lantern to guide my steps, and then go back quickly to tell your father to be of good cheer, for I will come."

"Aye, we will watch for you," said Judith. "And we will hide you in the stone chamber, where no harm can reach you, for the soldiers are only in the hall and at the doors."

And glad to have thus settled matters to her satisfaction, she turned away and was bounding lightly back along the narrow path below the cliff when a strong young hand seized her arm.

"Where is he?" demanded Giles, fiercely. "What have you done with Father Maurice, you Jew witch? Tell me, or I will fling you into the river."

"Will you?" asked the girl, her eyes flashing fire, and with a sudden turn of her free hand she flung her scarf into Giles' face. The soft, silken folds, fragrant with strange perfume, so blinded and bewildered him that, recoiling, he fell from his narrow foothold into the river, while Judith's mocking laugh rang out shrilly.

"Cool your hot head there, and clear your wits," she gibed. But Giles did not pause for any boyish exchange of compliments. He had caught sight of the lantern glimmering through the opening in the cliff, and hastily scrambling up on the bank, prepared to follow it. Father Maurice was making his way slowly and with difficulty through the dark, close, noisome passage that led up beneath the bluff. It was a way evidently constructed rudely for sharp and unwonted necessity, for walls and roof were roughly hewn, and so low and narrow that two could not pass abreast. Here

and there two or three rugged steps cut in the rock somewhat aided the ascent, which was in most places a steep climb into a black, horrible void, lit only by the trembling ray of the lantern which Father Maurice held before him.

Giles followed at a distance, knowing that if discovered he would be sent back with stern rebuke for his loving temerity. And, indeed, it was only affection that urged him on his way, for, strong of brain and nerve as he was, the hideous gloom and silence of the place would have destroyed any boyish desire of adventure.

The scene recalled to him the story Father Maurice had so often read to him from the great Dante. The tall, silent figure before him seemed like the poet's Virgil guiding into the very depths of that dark region where lost souls are buried in eternal despair.

Onward and upward the subterranean passage wound, cleaving its way through clammy rock and oozing earth, trickling with unseen waters, heavy with noxious odors. More than once the roof arched so low that the travelers had to bend almost into a creeping posture, and then it rose again into heights lost in impenetrable gloom. It was at one of these points that the lantern, which had been glimmering through the darkness as hopefully as a guiding star, swayed in the missionary's resolute hand.

Father Maurice tottered against the rocky wall with a feeble moan, and the saving light fell with a crash to the ground and was extinguished. Giles paused like one struck stone blind, so appalling for a moment was the gloom.

"O God," came the whispered prayer through the darkness; "give me strength, light—but for one hour more, if not—let my poor life—atone—for—for"—

"Father," rang out the cheery young voice, and strong arms were around the sinking form. "Do not give up. I am here."

"Giles!" The name came almost with a sob of mingled relief and reproach. "My son—my son—you here!—in this horrible pit of peril—have you followed me to death? Brave boy! I am dizzy and faint, Giles—I can not see. Remember—I bear the holy oil with me—save it from—from profanation—and for the rest—I die—as God wills!"

"No! no! no!" burst forth the boy, impetuously; "you shall not die in this foul hole. There is light before us. I can see it now, Father; we are near the end. I will put my arms beneath yours and be staff and support for you. I have sight and strength for both. Lean on me, Father, heavily as you will, but try to keep up. It will only be a few moments more."

And thus adjured, Father Maurice rallied his sinking powers, and almost borne up by the strong young arms that Giles placed around him, he crept feebly on for fifty yards or more, when the passage suddenly terminated in a small, circular room, through which a flight of stone steps wound up to the house above.

Standing on these steps, a flaring candle in her hand, was Judith, her great black eyes peering anxiously into the darkness.

"You have come! you have come!" she said, springing eagerly forward to meet the shadowy forms emerging from the passageway. "Mother said you could not, that the path was choked, and you could not pass. But I knew what Martin told me, and that you would find the way. But who is this?" and she flared her candle into Giles' face. "As I live, Sir Hot Head, in spite of his ducking! But what brings you to Fair Oaks?"

"No courtesy to you or yours," answered Giles, gruffly, for he was wet, chilled, anxious, and ill-tempered. "The passage upon which you set the Father has been well-nigh his death. Give him a breath of fresh air and a drop of wine, for he is nearly spent."

"Nay, I am better now, much better," said Father Maurice, as he sank down panting on the steps, and breathed in the fresh night air which came sweeping from above. "Your father—does he still live?"

"Yes, yes," answered Judith; "but in grievous pain and anguish. Oh! if you have the physic to heal or help, come quick, for his speech is well-nigh gone. My mother has sent word to the soldiers above that he is in agony, and no intruder must molest him; so they will not venture above the stairs. You may come up in safety to his chamber."

"Lead me there at once, my child; and you, Giles, help me a little further, and then the good work of this night, for which God reward you, will be fully done."

Leaning still on the Strong-Arm of Avalon, Father Maurice slowly made his way up the winding stairs; Judith with her taper leading them on. Through slits in the heavy walls, which gave the staircase light and air, came sounds of portent—the neighing of tethered horses, the clink of spurs, the measured tread of the sentries before the manor door, all told Giles that they were in the very jaws of the lion; that the Puritan soldiery, fierce with new alarm and bigoted hate, were holding Fair Oaks with an iron hand which would brook no trifling; that he and his friend, the Father, were here in their power, at the bidding of a wild-eyed, reckless girl.

Our hero felt a boyish delight at the peril of the situation that was only chilled by his anxiety for his beloved teacher, who drew a long, gasping breath of relief when the steep ascent ended in a narrow corridor.

"Rest here," said Judith, pointing to a cushioned divan in the deep embrasure of a window, "and I will go tell my mother that you have come."

"Now, God grant that it may not be a trap after all," said Giles. "I like not the looks of that black-eyed witch, nor the stories that are told of her. They say she can swim like a fish and fly like a bird."

"My son! my son!" exclaimed Father Maurice, in gentle reproof, "I thought you were better taught than to give credence to such follies."

"Follies they may be," said Giles, "and yet I have it from eye-witnesses, Father. Gerard Wintour said that he had seen her full a mile out amid the whitecaps of the bay, when the waves were dashing twenty feet high on the rock of St. Catherine's, and more than once has she been seen on cliffs that would daunt a man's strength and skill to climb. When she flung her scarf over my face, there was a sweetness upon it like the poison flower of the swamps. It so took my breath that I reeled over into the stream. I have heard it whispered that she was possessed by a mocking evil spirit, so sharp is she of wit and tongue."

"Give no ear to such whispers, my son," said Father Maurice. "I see no sign of evil in the child, who seems to me only wayward and untaught, and perhaps somewhat braver and bolder than becomes her years or sex. Remember, she has ever been scoffed at and avoided because of Jewish birth, and a woman's heart and

woman's tongue grow bitter and sharp when love and kindness are denied. It is in their softer nature to thrive on sweets."

As he spoke Judith appeared with her mother, whose dark eyes were dimmed by grateful tears.

"I scarcely hoped for this," she said, brokenly. "Truly God hath been pitiful to my sorrowing prayer that my husband might depart in peace. Come to him, good Father, and lift the burden that seems to weigh so cruelly on his struggling soul. There are wine and warmth within, and you look sorely weak and shaken by your night's journey, and must need refreshment."

"I would see your husband first," said Father Maurice, "for my mission of peace and mercy can not wait. Take me to his bedside, my daughter."

"Come, Sir Hot Head," said Judith, as her mother and the missionary turned into another hall, "you are wanted no more; neither am I, it seems. I owe you a warming for that ducking I gave you down below. Mother brewed me a hot posset after my chilly walk on the shore. I will share it with you; so come." She turned toward a curtained doorway, and Giles followed half reluctantly, though, to confess the truth, faint and chilled as he was, the hot posset was a temptation even from a—witch.

The room into which Judith led him was one of the most curious he had ever seen. In the days of the sturdy de Veres, Fair Oaks Manor, hospitable and full of good cheer though it was, had been bare and simple in its appointments as some old feudal keep, but now rich carpets ran the length of the corridors, tapestried hangings covered the grim and, in some places, moldy walls, lamps swung on silver chains from the oak-ribbed ceilings.

The room which Judith now entered was of still other fashion.

The floor was covered with rugs made of the softest skins the trappers could procure, divans of the same material stood about heaped with cushions of gaily embroidered silk and velvet, long mats of feather work gorgeous with the hues of every forest bird, hung on the walls that were further ornamented with strings of shells, dried vines, and nodding grasses, while on the high mantelpiece a great stuffed eagle outspread his monster wings. A log fire was burning in the great brick chimney, and before it stood a richly chased silver jug from which came the tempting odor of steaming milk and spiced wine.

"Both you and your jerkin are the worse for our meeting," said Judith, as kneeling down before the hearth she filled two silver cups with the posset, and handed one to her guest, who was indeed both wet and muddied from his night's adventure. "So we will drink to your better footing, Sir Hot Head. If mine were as unsteady, the eagles would have picked my bones long ere this."

CHAPTER VII.

THE WITCH OF FAIR OAKS.

"MY name is Giles Ventnor," said our hero, somewhat stiffly.

"I know," she answered. "You are the Strong-Arm of Avalon, though I may not add—the sure foot."

"There are few hunters even among the Nanticokes that I can not follow over the hills and rocks," said Giles, not a little nettled at this mischievous taunt.

"Boast not, Master Strong-Arm. How was it on that day a years ago, when you were birds'-nesting (a cruel sport to my mind) upon the cliffs of St. Gregory, and slipped from the rocks? But for the forked tree that caught you, you would have been dashed to pieces on the rocks below. In truth, my own breath so failed me that I came near following you from sheer fright."

"In Heaven's name, where were you?" asked Giles, startled beyond words, for he had prudently kept silent about this narrow escape, lest his mother should restrict him in future from such perilous sport.

"Feeding my eaglets on the ledge above you," was the answer.

"Your eaglets!" exclaimed Giles.

"Aye," she answered. "There is the mother-bird." She nodded toward the chimney place. "Hurley, my father's shepherd, shot her for stealing his lambs. And then Chico told me of

the starving birds in the nest on the cliff; I took them food every day until they could fly."

"Then, my faith, you must have wings yourself," blurted out Giles, in his amazement, for he knew the dizzy ledge of which she spoke.

"No; only a sure foot, a clear head, a bold heart—but what do I say? This heart is cold with fear to-night, which neither fire nor wine can warm," and she put down her scarce-tasted posset cup. "It seems a good man and true who came here with you to-night. Do you think, as he says, he can help my poor father?"

"He can do little for his body, I fear," answered Giles, grimly, "but much for his soul."

"His soul!" echoed Judith, gazing at him with puzzled eyes. "I do not take your meaning. My father's soul—what is that?"

It was Giles' turn to stare in amazement now. Never had he dreamed of such heathen ignorance as this, in a white girl, at least. "You have never heard of a soul?" he exclaimed.

"No; excepting this," and she put out a shapely little foot. "But I know nothing of books, or letters, or—or—prayers. Martin used to say I was no better than a bird or a fawn. It was thus: My mother is not of my father's race or creed, and lest one should offend the other in teaching me religion, they left me untaught. I know all the trees of the woods, and the songs of the birds, and the whisper of the wind, whether it tells of storm or calm, and the voice of the sea, whether it is angry or sad; but much of your Christian speech I do not understand."

Judith had dropped her gibing tone, and her voice and eyes were wistful and earnest.

But Giles felt no answering sympathy. Despite Father Maurice's wise and charitable instructions, the prejudices of those rugged times were strong within him, for, as his good teacher said, he had given more thought to sport than to books. Judith's open confession only filled his honest, simple soul with distrust and dismay. Surely, this girl, who understood the voice of bird and breeze and wave, must have unholy knowledge not given by God to Christian woman or man.

Perhaps it was well for Judith, whose instructor might have been overblunt and brusque in his teaching, that at this moment her mother appeared at the door.

"Your father calls for you, daughter," she said, "and you, too, young master of Avalon," she added, turning to Giles. "He would have Christian witness of his last words, and your good priest bids you come."

Giles rose at the words and followed the girl and her mother, sorely against his will. Indeed, he would gladly have braved again all the terrors of the subterranean passage to escape the scene before him. Death in any form has its horrors for the young, but the death-bed of James Wade!

As he passed through the long corridors, with their rich hangings and carpets and lamps of quaint design, all the rumors current in the province about this dying man recurred to Giles.

The story of James Wade was briefly this: Early in the days of the province a ship had arrived at the little town of St. Mary's with the usual quota of "redemptioners," that is, men and women brought out from the old country without any payment, and sold to wealthy planters or settlers for a certain number of years for a sum sufficient to cover the expense of their passage. This cus-

tom, begun doubtless in good faith and honest purpose, became so lucrative to ship masters and owners, that it led to frightful abuses. Men, women, and children were kidnapped in the English ports and transported against their wills across the ocean, into strange lands from which return was impossible.

These "white slaves," for they practically belonged to those who purchased their labor for a given number of years, were looked down upon almost as an inferior race by the haughty lords of the soil, though they were treated, in most cases, with justice and humanity, and often succeeded in working up into respectability and independence.

On the arrival of one of these ships, the good missionary Fathers, in need of hands to assist them in the secular work of their different stations, had selected this James Wade from the "redemptioners," paid the price demanded for his passage, and employed him for three years, during which he had proved himself skilful, intelligent, and industrious beyond their hopes. Tilling their lands, guiding their little skiffs through the streams and rivers in their missionary wanderings, raising their altars in the wilderness, and often serving the Mass said under the forest arches of some glade or glen untrodden till then by the white man's foot. At the end of the three years, James Wade found himself free, with a goodly store of tobacco (at that time it was used as money in the colonies) which the missionaries had generously allowed him to cultivate for his own use. With this he had purchased a small island at the mouth of the Potomac, remote from the settlements, and washed by the wider waves of the Chesapeake, and there he proceeded to make himself a home. A year later there had come out from the old country the tall, dark-

eyed Deborah whom Wade purchased from the ship-master, married at once by Christian rite, and took to his new island home. Soon there came rumor that the new wife had spoken falsely to the priest who had married them, that no baptismal water had ever flowed upon her head, that she was a Jewess by birth and belief—a race that in those days was shunned and hated even in the beautiful Land of the Sanctuary.

These rumors the Wades neither denied nor affirmed, but lived to themselves in a loneliness they seldom sought to break. Strange stories of Wade Island were whispered through the province; beacon lights, it was said, often flashed from its rocks; ships that never came to the settlements touched at its rude wharf; it was rumored that the turbulent spirit, William Clayborne, when baffled in his efforts against the Lords Proprietary and exiled from the province for rebellion, had returned to Wade Island, and thence sent forth spies and emissaries to his own followers, to the unfriendly tribes of Indians, and to the disaffected Puritans among the Colonists, exciting them all to discord and revolt.

And this suspicion had been fully confirmed two years before, when Clayborne, returning in triumph to the province as Commissioner from the Parliament in England, had conferred the confiscated manor of Fair Oaks on James Wade for loyal service to the Government. Then the hated redemptioner and his Jewish wife had come to take possession of the stately home of the exiled de Veres.

Slaves, redemptioners, servants of all kinds, filled the halls, tilled the well-kept grounds, and the manor of Fair Oaks was maintained in all its pride and beauty, but its owners were still pariahs, shunned, despised, and, it may be, feared, by their aristo-

cratic neighbors who were chafing angrily and restlessly under the new Puritan rule.

We can imagine, then, what a triumph of faith it was that had brought Giles out on his mission to-night, and with what horror and reluctance he followed his guides into the death-chamber of James Wade.

It was a spacious room furnished with the unwieldy splendor of those days—a huge bed, heavily curtained, massive chests of drawers, high-backed chairs, and carved tables. Full a dozen tapers burned on the silver sconces attached to the walls, for darkness had been one of the dying man's terrors. He lay propped among the pillows, his drawn, ashen face and glassy eyes turned toward Father Maurice, who knelt beside the bed, his own countenance pale as that of the dying, but radiant with a joyful triumph as of the angels "over the one sinner that doeth penance."

"Your father would speak to you, my child," he said, gently, to the trembling Judith. "And you, my son," continued Father Maurice to Giles, "I have called you to bear witness that this, our brother, has repented of all the sins and shortcomings of his life; that God hath shown him the mercy of which in our last hours we all have sore need, that after a life which may have been a scandal and a stumbling-block to many, he dies a faithful and penitent son of our holy Church."

"Aye," whispered the dying man, hoarsely; "faithful—and penitent. God hath been merciful—even at the last hour—and given—me peace. Judith—beloved child—kneel down beside me—your mother hath agreed—with this my last breath, I ask it—that you will be a Christian—"

The girl's dark head was bowed, sobbing, on the coverlet; the slight form shook, but there came no reply.

"Judith," continued the gasping voice, "give me your word, that I may bless you before I die—your faithful promise."

"Father! father!" the girl caught the icy, trembling hand and pressed it passionately to her lips, "do not ask me this. I can not promise, I can not—I can not. What do I know of these people but that they hate me and my mother? How can I, who have been as the wild deer and the eagle ever since I was born, vow to take upon me the bonds and laws of those who despise me? Father, father—leave me free—leave me free!"

And Giles, aghast as he stood at her words, felt a mingled thrill of horror and sympathy at the brave truthfulness of the girl in such an hour and such a scene.

But Father Maurice's low voice broke the painful silence. "Aye, leave her free, my son. It is a strong young soul whom God will call in His own way. Let no trouble for her disturb your dying peace. Bless her and leave her free."

The dying hand fell feebly on Judith's bowed head, but there was only an inarticulate murmur from the livid lips. Speech was gone. Father Maurice rose to pronounce the last absolution. Deborah sank sobbing by the bedside, and even Giles fell on his knees as the solemn words of peace and pardon sounded through the room, and with a faint struggle the spirit of James Wade passed to the judgment-seat of God.

His heavenly work done, Father Maurice tottered feebly back into a chair, the superhuman strength that until now had sustained him gone at last.

CHAPTER VIII.

THROUGH THE NIGHT TO THE DAWN.

THE sharp cry of the widowed wife rang through the room as Deborah flung herself beside her dead husband, and gave voice at last to her despair. But Giles paid no heed to this outburst of grief. He had sprung to Father Maurice's side in an anguish of fear of his own. "Father Maurice is dying! Oh, he, too, is dying!" cried Giles, appalled by the ashen face, the purple pallor of the lips, the closing eyes.

"Hush, hush, 'tis but a faint," said a quick, low voice, and Judith caught a vial and glass from the table near by. "Give him this. It is brandy," she continued, as Giles hesitated. "I tell you it is what he needs. Fool! do you think I would harm him?"

The Strong-Arm of Avalon felt himself thrust aside peremptorily, while this strange girl, trembling and overwrought as she was, poured the liquor into a spoon and pressed it between Father Maurice's lips. Slowly the dark eyes unclosed, but there was no light of recognition in them; the pale lips moved, but in wandering speech. Nature forced beyond her powers refused to rally.

"He is ill—ill indeed," said Judith, "and yet—yet he must go, before I call help to my father, to my mother. He, yon Christian priest, must not be found here."

"He can not go," said Giles, desperately. "He must have shelter somewhere—in this accursed den—shelter to—die!"

"Here," said Judith, darting across the room and swinging back a heavy door. "Push his chair in here. I will send you help when I can, but now you must hide, lest worse evil fall upon you," and as she spoke she took hold of the great cushioned chair in which Father Maurice reclined, and with Giles' help, pushed it across the room and through the open doorway—into a dim, shadowy space beyond. Closing the door with a heavy clang, she left Giles half distracted by grief and fear in the semi-darkness at his teacher's side.

For a moment he stood wrathful and bewildered, for the girl's wits moved too quickly for him to follow; then it flashed across his mind that it was indeed necessary to hide even thus—like rats in a hole, he bitterly thought, from those who must come to render the last offices in the death-chamber.

A faint glimmer of stars came through an arched window near him, and as Giles' eyes became accustomed to the pale light he saw that he was in the narrow, vaulted room which had once been the private chapel or oratory of the pious de Veres.

Evidently the faith lingering in Wade's breast had prevented him from desecrating this sacred spot by any profane usage; perhaps its holy reminder had had much to do with his late return to God. The altar, with crucifix and high silver candlesticks, stood untouched by sacrilegious hand; even a faint fragrance of forgotten incense seemed to linger in the dusky air. Giles remembered how, fully ten years ago, his father had brought him here to the funeral of his little playmate, Gustave de Vere. Robed in white vestments, Father Maurice had said Mass in this

same chapel, and had explained to the weeping mourners that the great Mother Church had only words and prayers of rejoicing when a sinless little child's soul was taken home to God. So beautiful had been the good Father's description that Giles could still recall how aggrieved he had felt that he could not go with little Gustave to such delights.

"Ah!" and a pang shot through the boy's heart at the thought, "truly it seems fitting that Father Maurice should have been brought to this holy place to die."

Rage and grief, fear and hope, ruled alternately in Giles' breast as, kneeling there in the star-lit gloom of the old chapel, he chafed his loved teacher's hands, smoothed back the damp hair from his cold brow, and by pleading words strove to recall him to consciousness.

From the outer room came sounds of sobbing and wailing, the murmur of hushed voices, the heavy, muffled movements telling that kindly hands were rendering the last sad services to the dead master of the house, while from below rose the neigh and tramp of horses, the tread of hurried feet, the clanking of spurs and arms. But free from all thought of grief or peril or pain, Father Maurice's spirit was wandering on beautiful heights, of which he spoke in strange words, filling his young hearer with wonder and awe.

Giles could not understand those broken whispers thrilling with meanings beyond his boyish reach, he could only listen in reverence that bordered on fear, as this strong-winged soul, poised for flight, revealed its purity, its holiness, its clear vision of things unseen. Then weary with his unaccustomed vigil, Giles would find his own consciousness slipping from him, and

would rouse himself with a malediction (for our Colonial hero was no saint), in the folly that had made him trust to the thought or word of a wild, reckless girl.

So two, three hours passed, and into the stretch of star-lit sky that arched the open windows there came the mysterious tremor of dawn, no flush of sunrise as yet, but only the thrill and quickening of Nature's pulse, telling that the life-giving light is near. Then the white, deathlike face seemed to quiver into consciousness, the dark eyes of Father Maurice looked up at his companion as if through a lifting film.

"Giles, my son, my faithful boy, it is you, beside me? Where are we, Giles?"

"In this accursed trap to which in my folly I led you," said the boy, passionately.

"Hush, hush!" was the gentle reproof. "These are not words for your lips, my son. I remember, I remember. It comes back to me clearly. James Wade sent for me, and, thank God, I reached him—he died in penitence and peace. Tell me, my Strong-Arm, on whom I have leaned in the darkness, was there not rumor of war, of bloodshed?"

"Aye, aye," answered Giles, in fierce triumph. "I think—I hope! the province is roused at last, though I can tell nothing from this hole in which we are forced to hide—for the Puritan soldiers are holding the house below. O Father, Father, what madness it was in me to listen to my mother's woman prayer, to bring you to this!"

"Nay, my son, it was right, a just and holy duty. A God-given duty, Giles, for it reaches further than you dream."

The stars had paled now, the dark blue vault of the sky was

shimmering into violet, a breeze that seemed fanned by an angel's wing came fluttering through the open window. Day was gaining on darkness. A faint glow seemed to kindle in Father Maurice's cheek, to light his eye, as he continued:

"Listen, my son. I am going from you, but into your hands, my Strong-Arm, I give the banner of peace to wave over this troubled land. There must be no war, no strife, no bloodshed, for you will bid all this cease."

"I, dear Father!" said Giles, thinking the speaker still raved in delirium. "I would do all that you bid me, but—but—I have no voice in council, no right to be heard. I am only a boy."

"Nay, listen, my son, listen," and again the strong spirit seemed to take hold of the feeble frame, and control voice, nerve, and brain.

"This much I may tell you without breaking any sacramental seal. James Wade, willing to undo the evil that he had wrought, put in my hands last night, a packet of papers of which he held unlawful possession, despatches sent months ago from the Lord Protector in England to Fuller and his council in Providence, advising submission to the Lord Proprietary's rule, and forbidding all intolerance and persecution and warfare in the province. This Richard Fuller, I have heard, is an honest man who obeys in all simplicity what he believes the will of the powers that be, and in these troublous times the best of us blind mortals can not always see in which way lie duty and right. But the despatches were withheld that turbulent men might ride into power on the waves of storm and strife, and now the Lord Proprietary hath doubtless the mind to wrest in wrath the obedience that should long since have been lawfully conceded."

Father Maurice paused, gasping for breath, for his strength had been overwrought by this lengthy speech.

"Father, dear Father, say no more," pleaded Giles. "Wait until you have regained your powers."

"Nay," a faint but radiant smile flickered on the pale lips, "that will not be on earth, my son." With trembling hand he drew from his breast a heavily sealed packet and continued solemnly: "If you would indeed obey my last bidding, my son, take this packet to him for whom it is marked as speedily as you can, that bloodshed may be averted, and the cross of Calvert rise again in peace over Maryland. More than enough, perhaps, have I loved this land of my exile and of my labors, this fair Sanctuary which seemed opened for the sorrowing and oppressed of every clime; overmuch have I grieved, that the clouds of strife and discord should have gathered upon this land of promise, blighting its beauty and its peace. Aye, even in my prayers have I offered my own poor life, as a holocaust, that God might spare His people from the rod of the oppressor, from the curse of war, from the sins of vengeance and bloodshed. And therefore in His mercy hath He given into my dying hands, as if by a miracle, the olive branch of peace. To you, my brave son, my Strong-Arm, I entrust it with—with my dying—prayer, my dying blessing—Giles!"

Again the speaker's strength failed. Shaken with contending emotions, Giles could not answer.

To be peacemaker, when his fierce young spirit was kindled with the joy of battle! And yet, it was the plea, the prayer, nay, the solemn bidding of those dying lips.

Giles lowered his proud young head and sobbed aloud. With-

out, the glory of the dawn brightened; the pure, faint flush of the horizon glowed with unseen fire; in the budding oak beyond the window a waking bird burst into raptured song. The day was very near.

“Have—have—I—your—promise—my—son?”

The low, gasping voice, the wistful, fading glance conquered. Impetuous in all things, Giles caught his loved friend's icy hand and pressed it again and again to his lips.

“Father, dear Father, yes; I promise! Yea, in God's holy name, I vow to do your will, to bear the packet as you bid me—even—even—if it costs my life.”

The numbing hand was lifted painfully to the boy's head in benediction, the lips murmured in voiceless prayer. And now the shadowy room brightened, timid beams trembled through the window, as the great portals of the east seemed to swing asunder in mist-veiled splendors of rose and violet and gold.

Suddenly, as if roused from a holy trance, Father Maurice sprang to his feet, his arms wide stretched, his face radiant with a joy unspeakable. The old altar of the de Veres had caught the sunrise, cross and tapers were glowing with the light of dawn. What ecstatic vision it brought to those dying eyes none may say, but in strong, raptured voice, Father Maurice began the words of the Mass: “*In nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti. Amen. Introibo ad altare Dei.*” Yet even as he spoke, he sank back in Giles' outstretched arms, and in the glory of the sunrise passed into the light of eternal day.

CHAPTER IX.

AN ESCAPE.

So strong and clear were those parting words that Giles could not believe that this was death. He placed the helpless form back on the chair and tried to chafe the icy hands into warmth again.

"Father!" he cried passionately, awed by the strange brightness of the smile that rested on the ashen face. "O Father! look at me, speak to me! Oh! he is dying—dying," and in his despair the boy rushed to the door and tried to burst out of his hiding-place for help.

But the bolt had been securely fastened without. Giles sprang to the open window to see if any one were within call, when there was a sudden sound of creaking hinges behind the altar, a trap door was lifted by a cautious, trembling hand, and a weazened old face appeared in the opening.

"Martin!" cried Giles, recognizing the old servant of the de Veres. "O Martin! quick, quick! Father Maurice is dying—brandy—wine—something, quick, to save him!"

The old man limped forward, cast a glance at the rigid form and fell upon his knees. "God have mercy on us, young master! He is dead!"

"No! no! no!" cried the young boy fiercely. "I tell you it is but a fainting fit. It was but a moment ago that he spoke. Wine, you old fool! wine! Nay, if you will not get it, I will break this

door down and cry for help!" And Giles would have rushed back to the door, but old Martin laid a shaking hand upon his arm, and spoke with solemn sternness.

"Peace, young master! In God's name, peace! Would you call in those who would hold this blessed corpse no more than carrion, to be hung on a gibbet for crows? Listen to me; there are fifty men quartered below, fierce with hate and drink. Captain Clayborne and fifty more are expected every minute. This house is in the hands of those who have sworn to pull down the cross of Calvert on the shores of Maryland. All up and down the river-side men are flying to arms, and the land is like to run with brave blood before the troubles are over. What care, think ye, the crew of devils below would have for this holy saint? His soul has gone to God, leave his body in peace."

"O my Father! my Father!" sobbed the boy, flinging himself down on his knees beside the silent form. "Why did I lead you into this death-trap? Why did I bring you here?"

"Nay, nay; do not blame yourself, lad. Could a holy priest have found more fitting death than here, at the foot of God's altar? Eh! eh! eh!" moaned the old man, breaking into a mournful croon. "And I would that I lay there in his place, for these are bitter days for the old and feeble of God's Church—dark, bitter days, lad."

"O my Father! my Father!" sobbed Giles, again scarcely heeding the old man's plaint. "I must take him home—home to Avalon, Martin. I will take him home in spite of every Round-head cur in Maryland."

"Home," echoed Martin, "to Avalon, you say? Poor lad! poor lad! Did ye not hear that Avalon was seized by the Puritans?"

"Avalon!" The red blood flushed to Giles' brow and then retreated, leaving it pale as marble. "They have seized Avalon, you say, old man? When?"

"Last night," answered Martin. "Faith, I thought ye knew it, lad, and had fled from the hawkers. There was a troop of horsemen galloped over here before the day broke, and they told that though the Governor was seizing the boats on the river, Clayborne had the vantage on the shore—the Manors of Avalon, Fair Oaks, and the Shorebanks being all held by his men—and boasting loud that the Leopards of Calvert would soon be driven to bay."

"It is a lie, a lie! I will not believe it!" burst forth Giles, fiercely. "With the five and twenty men that are there to do her bidding, my lady mother could hold Avalon's stout walls against five hundred. I tell you, old man, you have heard a foul Puritan lie!"

"Nay; there was one, who never lies, came to my hut this morning with the tidings. It was the Indian, Chico. He bade me seek his white brother here, and tell him that his boat was in the alders beneath Crowcliff; that the vultures were in the eagle's nest of Avalon, and the young eaglet must keep on the wing. I came to the house at the dawn of day, and had word with the little maid Judith. Eh, my master, but she is wise, wise beyond her years. It was she who told me to make my way up here and set ye both free through the chapel vaults which stretch below and join the passage by which ye came last night. She bade me say she would have come herself long since but that her mother has been so distraught with grief she could not leave her side."

Giles had stood like one dazed while the old man made this explanation. Father Maurice—his guide, his friend, his father—

gone! Avalon, his home, his mother, his sister, in the power of enemies! he himself a prisoner or a fugitive! It was little wonder that the awful changes of the past few hours fairly stunned the happy, thoughtless boy, who, until now, had scarcely known the meaning of sorrow or of care.

"You had best come away, lad," continued the old man, nodding impressively. "Come away while there is time, for none can tell what an hour may bring, and ye can do no more good here."

"But Father Maurice?" said Giles, in a choked voice. "Oh, I can not, I will not leave him like this!"

Old Martin hobbled toward the altar, pressed aside a sliding panel and disclosed a store of sacred treasure hidden within. There were holy vessels and vestments, albs of rich lace, heaps of fine altar linen yellow with age. The old man drew forth a black silk pall richly embroidered in white, and then closing the hiding-place, he approached the dead missionary.

"We will lay him at the foot of the altar," he said, "and cover him with this until to-night. Then my sons Matthew and Leonard will come at my bidding, and we will put the holy saint in the vaults below."

With sinking heart and reverent hands old Martin and Giles rendered these last services to the silent form of their beloved Father, covering him with the sacred symbol of rest and hope, and leaving him at the foot of the altar he had served so faithfully even unto death.

As Giles turned away from that shrouded form, he felt that he had left his own glad, thoughtless boyhood under that death-pall. Henceforth he must think and act and live a man.

"Come," said old Martin, laying his hand upon Giles' shoulder. "Ah, young master! if I had your strong heart and swift limbs, they would not find me here. Eh! eh! eh! I could handle a gun yet if it were not for this withered leg that I must drag with me to the grave, where it belongs. But I would die happy to see the masters of Fair Oaks have their own again. Come on down the steps here; they are broad, as they needs must be, for it is hither the de Veres bear their dead. Six of them lie already in the vaults below, with space for six more that mayhap will leave their bones in strangers' land. Six of them here, all young, all young, for the first blossoms of the transplanted trees fall early, eh! eh! fall early, my master." And croaking on in this mournful strain, the old man led Giles down the flight of broad, stone steps that descended by easy stages to the vaults which lined the walls below the chapel, and where, after the fashion of the old country from whence they had come, the de Veres buried their dead.

Here Giles' little playmate had been laid to rest ten years ago; here five other white tablets, placed at intervals along the walls, told of the little brothers and sisters that had preceded him, for, as old Martin said, the pale-face blossom drooped in this new land.

"Here they all lie," mumbled the old man. "Little Hubert, who went at six; Catherine, at three; Vivian and Arthur, who were no more than babes. Here they rest, and father, mother, and brothers are far away from them. It's here we will lay the good priest to-night."

Giles felt his warm, young blood chill with the natural recoil of youth from death and darkness. He seemed to be stifling in these gruesome depths, and it was with an indescribable sense of

relief that he heard a door burst open in the black void beyond the vaults, and saw a glad gleam of morning sunshine flash into the gloom, while hoarse, rough voices filled the silence with sudden clamor.

"Here's the hiding-place, Captain, stocked up with good casks of sack and malmsey. A black hole enough, and filled mayhap with Popish man-traps, for I have heard the de Vere wine cellar hath no equal in the province, and they guarded it well. There's a limping old cellarer somewhere about that knows the casks if we could find him."

"A murrain on the cellarer!" called another. "Break in the cask-heads, and let us draw for ourselves."

"Hear ye that? hear ye that?" muttered old Martin, excitedly. "Back, my young master. Hide in the dark here, while I go forward and serve these devils ere they flood the cellar with the de Vere malmsey that has mellowed untouched for a dozen years. Here, my master," he piped, stumbling forward as fast as his withered limb would allow.

"Here is old Martin, the cellarer, at your service; old Martin that knows every cask in the place, and will draw the best at your bidding. Good sack, or malmsey, or Madeira, all are here."

"You are overkind, my old friend," said the leader, holding back suspiciously. "Beware of serving us any of your Popish tricks in these black vaults of yours. We will skewer you, I warn you, with as little shrift as a one-legged goose."

"I can well believe that," said the old man, forcing a cracked laugh. "But ye need not fear. I am too old and feeble, my masters, to play either lion or fox, or even goose now."

"Broach your best cask of sack then, and be quick about it,

for we must be in the saddle before the sun is an hour higher. So come, my men, and drink your fill, for there is like to be hot work before us. The Governor has impressed all the vessels in the river and harbor of St. Mary's, and has called every able-bodied man to his standard. Everywhere the Papists are rising and will force their idolatries upon the people of God if we do not strike boldly. Drink your fill and let us be off." Giles had kept back in the shadow as Martin had warned him. But as the soldiers pressed forward into the cellars with their mugs and flagons, he saw a daring chance for escape. Pushing through the clamorous, eager throng gathered about the wine casks, he contrived to make his way to the open door and slip unnoticed into the yard, where a score or more horses with loosened bridle-rein and saddle girths were being hurriedly fed and watered by the Manor servants.

From smokehouse and dairy, others were bringing generous stores of meat and milk, butter, and cheese, for scorned though James Wade had been in life, there must be no stint in the funeral feast that would be spread to-day in the Manor hall in honor of the dead master.

Hurrying in through this busy scene, as if he, too, were bent on some errand, Giles soon gained the shelter of the tobacco sheds that stretched in a long line to the edge of the cliff, and once at this point he sprang down the steep, rugged descent with the agility of a young chamois and stood once more in glad freedom by the Potomac shore.

CHAPTER X.

THE FOSTER-BROTHERS.

THE broad river was rippling in the morning sunlight, the high banks of budding greenery were sparkling with the morning dew, earth and heaven were glowing with the promise of the opening day. Giles paused on the narrow stretch of shelving beach and drew a long breath of rapturous freedom. For the moment the grief, the horror, the desolation that had come upon him were forgotten in the glad reaction of youth from a long and terrible strain. His chilled blood leaped once more in a joyous flood of life, his young pulse bounded, his spirits rose buoyantly.

"Now for Chico and the boat," he said, "and then, then to join the brave work that is afoot—to strike down the villains that have dared to put foot on Avalon."

And quite forgetting that he bore Father Maurice's dying message of peace, Giles darted up the shore, bounding from land to rock, and from rock to land, as the incoming tide barred his way, until he reached a point where the cliff rose in a steep, jagged ascent directly from the river that broke deep and impassable at its feet. From beyond this turn came the fret and roar of a little creek leaping to meet the wider stream. Giles paused on a flat rock around which the rising tide was seething, and putting his fingers to his lips gave the bird-call that had been his signal to Chico since early childhood. There was no responsive echo, as was usual with the foster-brothers. Instead, from the crag above, came

another sound—a serpent's hiss. Giles flashed a keen, searching glance around him, but nothing was visible.

Again the snake-hiss warning of danger came from above, and Giles cautiously began to climb the cliff for a reconnaissance.

Sheltered by the rocks, shrubbery, and tangled vines, he reached the summit where the sound of voices, that below had been lost in the noisy roar of the creek, reached his ear, and peering from his hiding-place, he saw some twenty horsemen fording the fretting little stream. One of them had dismounted and held the rope of the little canoe which had been tied under the alders.

"The Lily of Avalon" painted in white letters on its stern left no doubt as to its ownership.

"Another Popish craft from up stream doubtless carrying more hot-headed fools to join this outbreak. What shall we do? Scuttle or capture it?"

"Scuttle it," was the answer of the stern-faced, dark-eyed leader. "There will be one boat-load less of rebels for the Government to hang. And keep a sharp lookout along the road for its owners. I know the lady of Avalon—she will sting while she hath breath."

Trembling with rage Giles had to stand mute in his shelter while one of the men below took an ax that swung to his saddle and crushed in the bottom of the little skiff with a couple of well directed blows, that made her fill and sink almost instantly.

For one fierce moment our hero was tempted to hurl down one of the great boulders from the cliff on his unconscious enemies.

But he recalled the snake signal; Chico was somewhere near, hiding, perhaps, in the undergrowth beneath him. For Chico's sake he withheld his vengeance and stood trembling with repressed

wrath while the horsemen disappeared around a curve of the narrow path.

Then Giles again gave the bird call. This time it was answered, and from a thicket of tangled shrubbery below, the young Indian came bounding up the cliff to Giles' side.

"My brother is safe?" he said, his dark eyes flashing joyfully.

"But the boat; our boat is gone," said Giles, with fierce impatience. "We are trapped like hares. The Puritans hold the shores."

"The woods are wide, and we know their trails," said Chico, with a nod toward the west. "I will guide my brother into the home of friends. But where is the Father?"

"Dead," said Giles, all the bitterness of his loss returning with the word.

"They killed him!" panted Chico. "Killed the black-robe Father, and—and my brother—fled like a woman from his side?"

"No! no! no!" replied Giles, indignantly. "He died, Chico, died of the fever that was consuming him when he rose from his couch at our call last night, died in my arms as the day broke."

"Died!" repeated Chico, incredulously. "There was no death in his voice, in his step last night. It is not thus strong men die!"

"Aye, it is, it is—when the soul upbears the body, Chico. Does not the dying chief sing the war song with his last breath? So it was the Father died—but the song was not of war, Chico, but of goodness and peace and love. And loath though I am to do his bidding, I must obey him, Chico," continued Giles, sorrowfully, "for I believe he watcheth us from heaven now." And as they huddled together in their hiding-place in the rocks, Giles told

in brief, broken words the story of the past night. As he listened, Chico's face kindled and softened strangely. Despite penance and reproof Father Maurice had gained mastery over this fierce, untamed spirit, a strong hold upon the young Indian's heart.

"I would that I, too, had been at his side," he said, as Giles finished. "But now, now that he is gone—the Great Spirit will avenge his servant. My brother will—see—" continued Chico, in fierce triumph, "the good Father's anger will fall upon his enemies; their blood will flow like a river in the moonrise."

"Hush, Chico," said Giles, sternly, though conscious of a sympathetic thrill in his own breast to this fierce wish. "You talk like an unbaptized savage. Think you that the saints in heaven seek for revenge? Nay, even do they forbid us, who are but sinners, to take it in their name," added Giles, ruefully. "Look at this," and he drew the sealed packet from his breast. "Almost with his last word Father Maurice bade me bear this to Captain Fuller, at Providence. It holds some message of grave import which will bring peace to the province. Peace, forsooth! when every drop of blood within me is boiling, Chico, for vengeance on the dogs that hunted him, our Father, to his death, for the fever seized him in those foul caves where he was forced to hide."

Chico stared at the packet with awestruck eyes. It was folded in heavy parchment, and bore the seal of the Lord Protector Cromwell. But seals and signatures had little weight with Chico. To him the packet was an awful talisman invested with supernatural powers. It had been entrusted by the dying priest to his brother, Strong-Arm, and Chico felt it must be guarded thenceforth at the cost of both their lives. For Chico had lived so much with his own wild tribe that he was but half a Christian. The

black-robed Father's teachings had been only dimly comprehended; he was vaguely conscious that there were mysteries too wonderful for him to penetrate, that the Christian priest wielded mighty powers before which the proudest and strongest of the white men bowed. And what this packet, given by his dying hand, held—who could say?

"Strong-Arm goes to do the Father's bidding?" asked Chico, in a low voice. "Then we may not join with those who are led by the pale-face chiefs, but take our own way through the forest where there will be none to stop us. For they who bear the message of the dead must not wait by the way. Let us go!"

Giles looked at Chico in astonishment. It was rarely that the young Indian thus asserted himself. He was generally content to follow his white brother's lead unquestioningly. There was a simple directness in his plan that startled Giles. It was true that if they were to bear the packet to the Puritans in Providence, it would be wise to take their way alone, unimpeded by friend or foe.

"It is more than a two days' journey," said Giles. "If we could but send a word to my mother, Chico, so that she may not grieve."

"The boat is gone," said the young Indian, stoically; "there are enemies on the shore, and strange men hold Avalon; only the woods are wide and free, and Chico knows every trail. And the black-robe's anger will fall upon us if we refuse to do his will.

"I have heard my mother, Nona, tell how long ago in the wigwams of the Piscataway, there was a medicine man so wise that the chiefs from the far rivers and hills came to him for the roots and leaves which he gathered in the forests and made into drinks that cooled fevers and drove away the black death from

his people, so that they grew stronger and braver than all the tribes along the banks of the Potomac. But still greater power had this medicine man, for, from his father and his father's father far back to the beginning of the tribe, there had come to him a snake stone that told of death and life."

"A snake stone! What is that?" asked Giles, curiously.

"My mother says it is white like the mist on the mountain, but in it the fire burns and the sun and the waters shine, and there is the blue of the sky, and the green of the trees, and it tells those who look in it what is to come."

"An opal!" said Giles, nodding. "Truly, there is some witchery in the stone. Be it evil or good, I can not say. My mother has one that was clasped on her arm by the King on the night of her wedding, and it turned blood red on the dreadful day they murdered him on the scaffold, though no tidings of the traitor's deed had yet come across the sea. Likewise did she note how it fainted to the paleness of death when my good father died, and it has taken no color since. Is it thus with your Indian snake stone, Chico?"

"Aye," nodded the boy; "and it could clean death from the stings and bites that kill, and from the wounds of the poisoned arrows shot by the tribes across the waters. All these things and many more could the snake stone do, for it had grown strong with the passing of snows and suns that wither the children of men. And, like the rest, the medicine man found his blood chilling and his heart beating slow, and knew that it was time for him to die; but the son whom he loved was with all the braves of the tribe out on the war path, and so he called to him his daughter, Miahta, and gave the snake stone to her keeping, telling her to put it in

her brother's hand and no other's, for thus from the beginning it was to pass from father to son. But though the tongue of the young squaw is silver and her eyes are stars, there is no truth in her heart."

"Chico! Chico!" exclaimed Giles. "Truly, that is the speech of a savage and not of a Christian youth. My own father ever told me from the time I had wit to catch his words, that man should reverence woman almost as he doth the angels. And truly our own little maid Margot, whom I know best, doth bear out his words."

"Of the Lily of Avalon I may not speak, except as if I were kneeling to pray," said Chico, his swarthy cheek flushing. "I say but what my mother has told me of the young squaws of her tribe. Miahta was false as the spring-time ice, for she had a lover among the Susquehannocks, and when her father had died, she fled away in the night to the foes of her people, and gave to her lover the stone of death and life."

"And what happened to them?" asked Giles, breathlessly.

"The stone flashed fire," answered Chico, gravely, "the fire that blazed from the storm-cloud, and when Miahta put it in her lover's hand it struck him as dead as the tree that is torn by the lightning from top to root. So it may happen to my brother, if he be not true to the trust of the dead. Let us go then and do the good Father's bidding, lest his anger fall upon us from the skies."

And though Giles did not share Chico's fears, he felt it would be quite useless to combat them. Meekness, forgiveness of injuries, charity for enemies, were virtues absolutely incomprehensible to this child of nature, who, despite all his Christian teachings, still held to the old vengeful laws of his tribe.

But fidelity to the trust of the dead—this was a stern, clear duty which Chico's savage soul could comprehend, and Giles could have found no safer friend to aid him in his mission or guide him on his way.

CHAPTER XI.

DISCORD AND DANGER.

As the two boys started out on their way, fording Crow Creek and treading with cautious steps the woods beyond, Giles tried to learn something from Chico regarding the seizure of his home. But all that the young Indian could tell was that, after waiting beneath Fair Oaks' cliff until two hours after midnight, he had returned, as Giles had bidden him, to Avalon, and found black Louis hiding beneath the water-stair to warn them in Madame Ventnor's name of the peril that threatened the young master of the house should he show himself at Avalon.

"And I said naught to the black face, but that my brother would obey his mother's word," said Chico, who seldom wasted speech.

"Thank Heaven, you told my mother nothing more; for God knows she hath sorrow enough," said Giles.

The boys kept on their way through woods just touched with the tender green of early spring. Brooklets swollen by heavy rains and melting snows foamed across their path, sunbeams danced through the budding foliage above them, at their feet the fragrant blossoms of the trailing arbutus were waking into life under last year's sodden leaves, now and then a young deer, glancing for a moment from a thicket, bounded shyly away. The shady depths of these virgin woods seemed hitherto untrodden by the foot of man. Forcing their way through tangled under-

growth, wading streams, plunging knee deep into marshes and morasses, the young travelers kept on, until the sun reached its noonday height and they paused to rest by a broad river, the Patuxent, whose waters barred their way.

Chico, who wore a skin hunting-pouch slung over his shoulder, took from it a string of twisted grass and a hook, and perching himself on a log jutting out into the stream, soon had a good-sized fish dangling on the end of his line. Then building a fire upon a flat rock, he proceeded to broil his prize for dinner, which both boys ate voraciously after their long fast. The rude repast recalled to Giles his last meal in the stately halls of Avalon, seated between his beautiful mother and sister, and his young face darkened fiercely as he thought of stern, strange men in possession of his home.

"Come, Chico," he said to his companion, who seemed disposed to linger, "let us hurry on, and be done with our mission, for if the good Father's packet fail to bring peace, as I half pray it may, I would join the brave work that is afoot. The Governor is calling all to arms, as you have heard, and the master of Avalon should not be darting through the wilderness like a hunted hare, when his home and its women are in the hands of his enemies. How long think you it will take to reach the Severn?"

"It is two days' journey on foot," answered Chico.

"Two days!" said Giles, impatiently, as he thought of the Wintours, and Storys, and bold Tom Darrell, and all his sturdy young mates even now roused by the Governor's call. "Two days! By my father's chart, it is scarce fifty miles, Chico!"

"As the crow flies," answered Chico, tersely, "but we are not crows."

"But two days!" repeated Giles. "Why, the battle that is threatened may be done and over with ere that. We must quicken our pace or shorten our route. Truly it is maddening to be plodding leaden-footed through wood and slime with an open river dancing before us. A plague upon the villains that scuttled our boat!"

"There are boats near by," said Chico, tersely.

"Where?" asked Giles, his eyes brightening.

"Prestonbanks is just beyond the willows," continued Chico, significantly, "but my brother will not be wise to be seen there."

"Not while that lank-faced Dick Preston still has the black eye I gave him three days ago," said Giles, laughing. "You should have seen the foul-mouthed braggart go down under my fist, Chico. Three times did he strive to throw me, and each time did I fling him back into the mud, until jerkin and hose were sad-colored indeed, and one eye was, so he cried to me, put out forever. Bah! the craven weakling shed tears like a girl after taunting me to the fight with his slanderous words of King and Church."

"My brother is too quick with his blows," said the Indian boy, gravely. "What are words that they should stir his blood?"

"What are words?" echoed Giles, haughtily. "Little to a redskin, mayhap, Chico, for you are not made as we. Yet even you, would you have scorn cast on your mother, Nona?"

"Puff," said Chico, blowing a light breath to the wind. "It would not harm. My mother can make the tongue wither like a dry leaf in the mouth, she can make the strong-limbed man shake

like a tree in the storm, she can make the wise head weak and foolish as the child's—who can not walk. My mother hath learned the wisdom of her people, of the tribes who have gone far away into the land of the setting sun."

"Aye, she knows more than is right and good for her, to that I can vouch, Chico," answered Giles, who had been early impressed by some of his foster-mother's uncanny powers. "And betwixt ourselves, Chico, for I would say naught that other ears might find of evil meaning, I fear the devil has had much to do with these teachings of which you speak. You know neither my mother nor Father Maurice could persuade Nona to be baptized."

"She was marked with the blood of the great Tayac, her father, who was killed the night she was born," said Chico, proudly. "She would not have the stain washed away in the blessed water that the black robe Father pours, for the blood of a chief will open to a squaw the happy hunting grounds where my father waits for her. Why should Nona seek the heaven where the pale-faces rule? In the hunting grounds with the kings who are her fathers, she will be great, and her voice will be heard, and she will sit at the side of my father, who wore the scalps of fifty Susquehannocks at his belt."

"Chico!" exclaimed Giles, quite dismayed at this outburst of heathenism. "I doubt sorely if one word of good Father Maurice's lessons hath ever reached deeper than your own scalp. Have you not heard him say again and again that only those who are baptized can enter heaven?"

"There are the hunting grounds," said Chico, philosophically, "and the forests are green always, and the snows never come, and the arm of the brave never grows weak, nor does his bow fail."

"There is no such place," said Giles, indignantly. "After all that has been taught you, Chico, you talk like a savage still. I tell you there are no hunting grounds for you or your chiefs."

"That my brother can not know," said Chico, calmly.

"I do," said Giles, flushing wrathfully at this unlooked-for deflection from the faith, for truly this was worse than the Puritan heresy for which he had laid Dick Preston low. "Every Christian knows it, Chico, and you should know it too, if your wits had not been flying with the birds and hares while Father Maurice taught God's word."

"I say but what the kings and the chiefs and the wise men of the tribes have said from the beginning," said Chico.

"Then the kings and chiefs and the wise men of the tribes were all liars, and may the foul fiend seize them, and you, too, Chico, if you hold to their lying words."

"My brother is angry," said the young Indian, his face glowing for a moment to a deeper red at this rough speech.

"Brother me no more," said Giles, hotly. "I will hold neither love nor kinship with a heathen dog."

"Dog!" echoed Chico, and this time his swarthy face glowed indeed, and the dark eyes flashed fire. "It is the pale-face who is dog in these forests. The Indian is the deer; the bear and the buffalo and the land is theirs. Let the pale-face dog find the trail alone! Chico goes no more with him." And as he spoke the Indian boy proudly turned away, and walking a few yards to the right bounded down the high bank into the thicket of alders that bordered the river, and disappeared from Giles' sight.

For a few moments our hero, still fierce in what he felt to be righteous wrath, kept on his way, expecting Chico, whose

fidelity had never failed, to reappear at his side. Usually his red-skinned brother was stoically calm under Giles' most tempestuous outbursts. But to-day the young master of Avalon waited in vain for the return of his faithful vassal. Chico had gone indeed, and after Giles had loitered for an hour or more in expectation of his late companion's reappearance, he realized with no little dismay that he must needs keep on his way alone.

"Let him go," muttered our hero angrily. "Ill company is worse than none, and truly to-day Chico was of the worst."

Yet as he tramped sturdily on through the wild, trackless solitude, other thoughts came to the lonely young traveler. Had he not stung his faithful friend and brother beyond bearing? Words were but breath as Chico had said, yet "dog" was an insult that could penetrate even the scalp of an Indian brave. And had not Father Maurice ever taught that these red-skinned children of the forest would be judged mercifully by their lesser lights?

Poor Chico! faithful Chico! Giles struggling on over rocks and through thickets, missed his guide and comrade more at every step. For the afternoon shadows were lengthening now, and our hero felt bewildered by the forest mazes the young Indian could have threaded with unerring step. Giles dared not venture beyond sight of the guiding river, yet Prestonbanks, with its wide acres of forest and field, guarded the shore. Prestonbanks, with whose young Puritan heir the master of Avalon was at fierce feud.

With Dick Preston's eye still black from their recent encounter, it behooved Giles to tread very gingerly indeed on the Prestonbanks grounds, for not only Dick himself in vengeful mood was to be avoided, but his father's house had been a rally-

ing place for the Puritan faction ever since the troubles in the province had begun.

It was with unwonted caution, then, that our hero kept on his way, carefully avoiding all paths and clearings that told of man's presence, until suddenly his right foot went down with a woeful slip through a heap of last year's leaves, that concealed a strong trap.

Dick Preston's trap, set for the fox that had been fattening on his chickens and lambs. In vain Giles struggled to free himself—his leg was held in a vise that he could not escape, and the young master of Avalon realized with despairing rage that he was an ignoble prisoner in the power of his enemy.

CHAPTER XII.

THE FOX TRAP.

Now indeed did Giles bemoan the loss of Chico's strong arm and sharp hunting knife, for all his own efforts were vain—the trap had been set to hold the faster with its victim's struggles.

Not until his torn and bleeding limb warned him how hopeless was his fight against fate did our hero's bold spirit fail. Then the ignominy of the situation seemed more than he could bear. To be caught in a fox trap for the sport of his enemies! How they would flout and scoff at him, and doubtless wreak due vengeance on him in his helplessness. In his bitter rage Giles felt he would rather gladly break away and leave his maimed limb as their trophy, and live crippled forever, than meet the fate before him. Surely Heaven had deserted him in his sorest need.

O for Chico! bold, faithful Chico! who had never failed him until now. And again Giles renewed his struggles to free himself, until betwixt rage and pain and despair the tears welled up into his eyes and hard sobs choked his utterance of the prayer he strove to speak.

But this Strong-Arm of Avalon belonged to a time when youth was trained to meet the fiercest blasts of fortune with the rugged strength and manly wisdom that have given this western world to the white man's rule.

His first rebellious fury passed, Giles began to think. He would be found here a prisoner, would doubtless be abused and ill-

treated by his boyish foes, but—but—there might be even greater danger. He would, perhaps, be taken before older men and required to explain his presence at Prestonbanks; he would be searched and Father Maurice's packet found upon him.

"Nay; I can guard that at least," thought Giles, with quick decision, and scraping the earth from under a rock within his reach, he buried the packet in the hollow, and covered the loosened dirt again with withered leaves.

Then, noting the spot with a woodsman's practiced eye, he felt the trust of the dead was secure until such time as he could safely take it from its hiding-place.

Scarcely had he finished his task when he heard the sound of voices near by, and through the thicket that still hid him from their sight he descried some half score boys, armed with old guns and muskets, marching, Indian file, under the leadership of Dick Preston, who, with his black eye still bandaged, was evidently drilling his recruits.

"Attention! halt! right face!" shouted Dick, and as the line faced, Giles recognized Hiram Baxter and Luke Graves, and several others with whom he had had rough encounters in the past, and who owed him payment for black eyes and broken noses given in loyal defense of the faith; for all Father Maurice's wise teachings had failed to impress on his hot-headed young pupil, that God's work was never done by the "apostolic blows and knocks" which young Strong-Arm of Avalon had ever ready to clinch an argument. Giles held his breath lest it should stir a fluttering leaf; perhaps, after all, this foeman's parade might pass him by. These mimicries of martial life were the only games allowed by the stern Puritan fathers who frowned upon all the

innocent sports and pastimes upon which the great Mother Church had smiled approval. Even beautiful Christmas had been condemned as a Popish superstition, and woe be to the Puritan lad or lass who ventured to join in the merry-making of that happy day. The grim game of war had become a popular pastime, and, encouraged by the old Cromwellian soldiers who had found their way across the Atlantic, the boys marched and countermarched, re-fought Naseby and Worcester with the acorns and nuts of the Maryland forest, and built and defended their forts of snow.

But to-day there seemed dissatisfaction in the juvenile ranks. Luke Graves grounded his musket, a mutinous scowl on his long, sallow face. "I have had enough of this," he said. "We are too old for play when there's fighting to be had in dead earnest. The Papists are rallying their boys through the length and breadth of the province, to battle for the Pope and King, and we should rally, too. It is no time for folly like this."

"Luke is right," said Amos Dunn. "We are not children, to be thrust aside when there is work like that of last night going forward. With the Papists bursting into Prestonbanks and rifling the records of the province, who can tell what will come next? We will be burned in our beds, my mother says."

"Aye," put in Hiram Baxter, a dull-faced lad with big, staring, watery eyes; "and my father says there is no safety for God's people while one of the Popish priests hath foot in the province. For they are in league with the Antichrist of Rome, as we know. And he hath rule over the powers of darkness, and they work by ways no man can see. There is a report from Fair Oaks Manor that James Wade has been done to death by their wicked spells. All the doctors and leeches could do naught for

him, though Mistress Wade promised the weight of their physic in gold. And Master Bruff, who stopped for speech with my father as he went home, said the sickness was such as his skill could not reach, for, though he had drawn well-nigh a bucket of blood from him, the fever still burned like fire in his veins, and he cried that only the priest could give him peace. And, as my father says, it is known that these Jesuits have some strange, white powder that has power over these agues and fevers; doubtless they conveyed to him some evil bewitchment that poisoned his veins."

"'Tis a lie! a foul, slanderous lie!" burst forth in fierce, passionate tones from the thicket near by, for alas! our hot-headed young hero could bear no more. Under present conditions his boiling blood might have withstood the attacks on Pope and Church, King and country, but to hear Father Maurice—sainted, martyred Father Maurice—called a poisoner! Giles would have "nailed the lie" if it cost him a hundred lives.

There was a sudden, startled silence. Hiram Baxter's loose jaw dropped in terror, and for a moment the boldest of the juvenile Covenanters looked dismayed. The grim-visaged Luke was the first to recover himself.

"Who is it speaks?" he asked, sharply.

"I," was the answer. "I, Giles Ventnor, of Avalon, who, if I were not held by this trap here, would choke the lie in your throats."

But the bold, defiant words were lost in a fierce, triumphant outcry, as bursting through the shielding thicket Giles' foes were upon him ten to one.

"Trapped! trapped! Ho! ho! A Papist fox! Ventnor of Avalon! The Strong-Arm! The braggart! Caught by the leg!

Caught! caught!" rang the vengeful shouts as the delighted tormentors gathered around their helpless victim.

"Come on, ye cowards! come on!" called their prisoner, defiantly. "The Strong-Arm of Avalon can hold his own against you yet. Hiram Baxter, yesterday you ran from me like a hunted hare, mayhap ye will stand up to me now while I tell you that all ye said but a moment ago is a lie, a foul, slanderous Puritan lie, and if ye will come within reach of my arm I will choke it in your throat."

A mad challenge indeed, but Giles was well-nigh mad with the rage, pain, grief, and despair new to his fierce, untamed spirit, to his brave, bold, tender, young heart.

For then began a cruel scene—a scene that, we trust, could have no counterpart in these gentler times of ours, though the twentieth century boy will doubtless, sometimes, feel the barbaric drop seething in his blood. In the seventeenth century boy it still boiled fiercely, and Religion, with her handmaid Chivalry, could only guide and control the wild spirit which it was impossible to subdue.

"Down with the Papist! Let us see what Strong-Arm of Avalon can do now," taunted the pitiless band, as they rained sticks and stones, mud and spittle on the victim, interlarding their attack with rough words which we may not transcribe.

But Giles held himself boldly and bravely in the unequal contest. Crippled captive that he was—for the trap was a powerful combination of leathern thongs and oaken beams set with a hidden spring, the young master of Avalon's arm had lost nothing of its strength; nay, it had gained the mighty nerve of despair.

"Ye cowards! curs! cravens! come on! come on!" he shouted

defiantly, dealing blows right and left at those of his assailants who ventured within his reach, and before they realized their danger Dick Preston's other eye was nearly closed, Hiram Baxter's nose was streaming blood, and Luke Graves had gone down under a knock that made him see more stars than his lowering gaze had ever counted in his native skies. Maddened with rage and pain, the tormentors turned with new fury on their victim. Luke Graves sprang to his feet, a baleful light in his gloomy eyes.

"Burn him, boys! burn the bloody Papist! The devil has given strength to his arm, and he will kill any one who goes within his reach. Smoke old Satan out!"

"Aye! aye!" cried half a dozen voices, taking up the cruel note. "Scorch him, pile up the fagots, and let us have a Papist roast. Singe the fox we've caught, boys, singe him till he howls."

Giles' face whitened beneath its coat of tan. Though he scarcely believed the mocking fools dared murder him outright, he felt they were capable of any cruelty. For these were days when tortures, from which our present civilization recoils, were regarded with dulled and careless eye. But though a thrill of natural terror shot through his frame at this fiendish threat, his tormentors did not see him flinch.

"Ye cowards," he said, defiantly. "Ye skulking cowards, harm me if ye dare! Such vengeance will my kinsman, Lord Baltimore, wreak on ye, that your own mothers will curse the day you were born."

"Ho! ho! Who fears Baltimore? Old Bogy Baltimore! His own head is shaking," was the scoffing shout. "Come on, mates! Let us make a blaze that will set the braggart squealing for mercy."

And with pitiless glee they began to rake together dry twigs and fagots and dead leaves in a circle around their prisoner, gibing and jeering at him the while in a way that kept aboil the blood which perhaps might have chilled with fear. We must confess there was little of the martyr spirit in our hero, for wild with rage and helpless fury he hurled not only fierce words and invectives at his foes, but every loose rock and clod of earth within his reach.

It was a brave stand even for the Strong-Arm of Avalon, but it was a hopeless one, for with a vengeful shout Hiram Baxter struck fire from his flint, and the heap of fagots before him burst into flames.

"Singe the Papist fox! Scorch him! Make him squeal!" went up the pitiless cry as the wood began to snap and crackle all around the victim, and the smoke rose in a pungent, stifling cloud, while Giles, gasping, choking, felt with one last, wild, fierce throb of wrath that all was over with him.

"God have mercy on me! Forgive me my sins!" panted the brave boy, as he struggled for breath in the white, blinding, choking clouds. "Help! here! help! They are murdering me!" he strove to shout—for was it fancy or was that the ring of horses' feet near by? "Help! Mother Mary, pray for me! Help! I say!" And then, then, just as the sight seemed going out of Giles' stinging eyes, came deep men's voices through the blinding, stifling clouds.

"You young villains! devils! what are you doing here?" and strong feet tramped down the blazing wood, strong hands cut the bonds that held Giles captive, strong arms bore him fainting and senseless into the pure air again.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN THE HANDS OF THE MIGHTY.

A CAPFUL of water flung into Giles' face brought his stifled wits back to him. Through half-blinded eyes, still stinging with smoke, he saw himself surrounded by a dozen or so grim-faced men, some of whom had dismounted from their horses to aid him and scatter his young tormentors, who were flying in all directions before them. The leader of these timely rescuers still sat on his horse and bent a searching gaze on our hero as he struggled to his feet. He was a tall, well-built man, with clear, olive skin and a face that told of indomitable will, so firm was the set of the resolute lips, so piercing the glance of the dark, grave eyes.

"Good! You have found your wits and legs again, my lad," he said, not unkindly. "A scurvy trick those young villains were playing you. If I have voice in the matter, they shall count enough stripes on their backs to remember it for many a day."

"I will lay no hand on my boy," said a sturdy man at the speaker's side. "Lads must settle scores betwixt themselves, even if they sometimes take an overrude way. There is no greater ruffler or fighter in the province than this same young cock-sparrow of Avalon."

"Avalon!" exclaimed the other, quickly. "Is this young Ventnor of Avalon? By my faith, we are well met, youngster. I have business with you. Help him to your saddle, Griggs; he

is a bit dazed yet, and bring him to the manor-house here. I would have speech with him."

Something in the changed tone and glance of the speaker told Giles that remonstrance was useless, yet he ventured an appeal:

"I beg you will not delay me, sir," he said, anxiously. "I must be at Pynehill Creek before night, and the sun is already low."

"You could make poor speed with that torn leg of yours, I fear," and the dark eyes gleamed curiously as they turned upon Giles. "Our good friend, Mrs. Preston, has lotions and bandages that will ease it, and I think you will find it wiser to wait until day."

"Which means that the Colonel has use for you, and you are not to squirm off, my lad," said Griggs, who had lifted our hero into the saddle before him. "But you need not fear, no harm will come to you if you are wise enough to do his bidding."

"I have other work," said Giles, fiercely impatient of his companion's strong hold about his waist.

"That does not count," was the grim answer. "Nothing counts with the Colonel but his own work, and his own will, and his own way. And if you chance to be in that way you must bend to his bidding, I warn you; bend or break."

As the speaker drew rein before the gloomy old Manor of Prestonbanks, Giles knew that he was in a stronger trap than that he had fallen into an hour ago, and rejoiced that Father Maurice's packet lay safely hidden under the rocks and withered leaves. Young Dick and his mates were not to be seen, but there was unusual clamor of servants and horses and men about the grim,

old house, which, shaded by a mighty growth of chestnuts, looked down on the Patuxent.

Giles was lifted from the saddle by the sturdy Griggs and led limping into a wide, stone-paved hall, grim and bare as that of an old feudal fortress, yet bearing marks of some fierce *mêlée* in broken stools and lamps, wrested bolts and shivered glass.

A group of solemn-visaged men were discussing the events of the previous night when Governor Stone's messengers had burst in upon the manor, recaptured the records of the province, which had been taken possession of by the Puritan party, and seized the arms and ammunition stored at Prestonbanks for time of need.

Fierce mutterings and denunciations of this high-handed defiance reached Giles' ear as he sat by Griggs' side on the wooden settle in sore doubts as to what bit of ill-fortune would befall him next.

The ominous tones of the "worshipful Master Baxter," who was one of the declaimers, did not tend to reassure him.

"These madmen have but hastened the hour when this promised land shall be delivered unto us. We are called forth to smite the idolaters, hip and thigh, to smite and spare not neither the old nor the young, the strong nor weak, that Babylon may not have turret nor foundation stone in this new land of the Covenant."

"A prating old fool!" muttered Griggs. "Heed him not, lad, though it is such windbags as he that turn many a dull soldier's sense away with their squealing clamor. In truth, if there is to be bloody work, as after last night's bold challenge seems likely, you will do well to get out of the reach of Master Hiram Baxter and his kind with all the speed you can master, for that evil-

eyed son of his swore to me to-day, when I would have belabored him with my musket butt for trying to roast you, that three times you had well-nigh killed him, and that Satan had put strength in your arm which none could resist. But here comes the Colonel to have speech with you. A word in your ear, my lad; vex him neither with too bold nor too still a tongue; speak him honestly if you can, but if a lie will speed you out of his keeping, do not flinch at it, for he hath a clutch tighter than the devil's claw."

And Griggs, who was an old soldier of fortune with a philosophic indifference to parties or creeds, gave Giles a final nod of warning as the Colonel, who had stopped to exchange a few words with some of the speakers by the door, approached our hero with an impatient frown on his brow boding ill for the coming interview.

"Come hither, boy," he said, pushing open a door leading from the hall into a small room that bore some semblance of comfort. Mats woven of rushes were on the floor; there were some cumbrous pieces of furniture battered with rough usage; pewter dishes were ranged on the high mantelshelf; but everything showed the stern home of a creed which condemned all gladness and joy.

Giles' companion closed the door, and slipping the iron bolt into place stood for a moment in silent thought. Through a narrow-paned window there came the last rays of a red sunset, foreboding storm, and silhouetted against this ominous glow was the stern, resolute face of the man who, Giles vaguely felt, had his fate in his hands.

"So," he said at last, rousing from his reverie and fixing his keen eyes upon the boy with a not unkindly glance. "This is

Master Giles Ventnor, of Avalon. You have the look of your father, boy. A brave man and a true, though I have no reason to bear him in friendly memory. How old may you be, Master Giles Ventnor?"

"Sixteen last Michaelmas, sir," was the reply.

"Too young by four or five years to be without bit or rein. Does your mother know of these mad ventures of yours?"

"Nay, sir; for the venture in which you found me to-day was scarcely of my seeking."

"What of your venture last night? Guiding a Papist priest by stealthy ways and at the peril of life into Fair Oaks Manor, where you left him dead—to raise new clamor and cabals in this distracted land."

"They have found that holy corpse, then?" said Giles, excitedly. "Old Martin pledged himself to bury it in all secrecy in the de Vere vault to-night. I was fool to trust the shaking old dotard."

"So, there is no doubt of the story?" said Giles' companion, a mocking smile playing upon his lips. "I was not quite sure you were the boy, for all lips were sealed that I strove to question, but since you confess it, perhaps you can tell me more. A packet of some value to me left in Master James Wade's keeping can not be found. His wife tells me that at his bidding she placed it under his pillow last night, some three hours before he died. It has disappeared. The trusty servants who rendered the last offices to his poor clay have seen nothing of it. I have reason to think," the dark eyes grew suddenly fierce and forbidding, "that by some trickery the priest beguiled it from him."

"Trickery!" flared up Giles. "Who talks of trickery? James

Wade was trembling with fear of God's judgment, and his wife came weeping to my mother and besought her in God's name to send Father Maurice to his aid. And I went to seek him. Far better had I let the reprobate die in his sins," said Giles, passionately.

"Far better," assented the other grimly, "for he hath left judgment behind to fall on your head, Master Ventnor. It is evident you can tell something of this packet, for that your priests shuffle boldly with the secrets they wrest from trembling sinners, we all know."

"They lie who say it," said honest Giles, fiercely. "Never yet hath a priest betrayed the secrets of a penitent sinner. Father Maurice told me only what I must do to fulfil the dead man's last prayer. And—and—" Giles stopped, conscious too late that he had said more than it was wise to betray.

His interlocutor had learned enough. "You are like your father, Master Giles," he said, with a curious smile, half scornful, half kindly. "There was but one way out of a dilemma with him, and that was to take the bull by the horns. It would serve you better if you had a touch of your lady mother's keener wit. So, this good father gave you the packet?"

"I said not that," answered Giles, with a sudden access of prudence. His companion laughed aloud, a harsh, mirthless laugh that had no humor or joy in its tone.

"You can not lie, Master Ventnor; it is not in your blood. You have the packet?"

"Nay; there you lie," said Giles, with the reckless wrath of a baited creature. "I swear to Heaven I have it not, and more than this I will not say, though you tear me limb from limb."

This son of the north wind, roused at last, faced his companion with a glance resolute as his own. A fierce oath burst from the latter's lips; all the light of his countenance suddenly went out in a black frown of rage.

"Do you know whom you defy, Master Ventnor?" he asked, hoarsely.

"No," answered Giles; flinching not a whit under the blaze of those stormy eyes.

"One who holds the power to crush you and yours by a turn of his hand," was the fierce, low-voiced rejoinder. "I am Clayborne of Kent."

That our hero's bold heart gave a leap at this announcement we can not deny.

Clayborne of Kent, the arch-enemy of the house of Calvert, the arch-rebel who had fomented discord, tumult, and war in the province of Maryland ever since its foundation, the arch-traitor who, defeated, disgraced, exiled for years from the shores of the Chesapeake, had returned in vengeful triumph, armed with all the authority of the new Puritan power. Clayborne of Kent, the evil spirit of Maryland! With an odd thrill Giles recalled old Griggs' parting words, "His clutch is tighter than the devil's claw." But our young Cavalier bore himself none the less fearlessly, though his heart beat with a quicker pulse as he replied:

"I do not dispute your power, Colonel Clayborne. You were my father's enemy, and are, doubtless, mine."

"Not unless you will have it so, you young fool," said Clayborne, impatiently. "I would befriend you, save you, boy. Baltimore's power has fallen, and with it all who have trusted in him. You are fatherless, well-nigh friendless under the new rule

that sways the province. This packet, which by James Wade's treachery hath fallen into your hands, is in truth mine, and of value to me. Return it to me, and you will be sent back to your home in all honor and safety, and you and yours will be under a protection that none in this land now dare defy."

The glow had died out of the west, the twilight had fallen gray and gloomy, all the buoyancy and brightness of the day had gone. With night coming on—a prisoner in the hands of bitter enemies—Giles might have been pardoned if he had doubted or faltered, nay, even in boyish weakness given up his trust.

But our young Colonial Cavalier was of a race that had never quailed before scepter or sword.

"The packet is not mine to give nor yours to take, Colonel Clayborne. It must be given to him whose name it bears. To this I have pledged my word, and whether good or ill betide me, I must keep my faith."

"And brave my power, you young madman?" said Clayborne, fiercely.

"You have said it was not in my blood to lie," said Giles. "Neither, Colonel Clayborne, is it in the Ventnor spirit to fear."

"We will prove that, my young Sir Braggart," was the furious answer. "Bolder spirits than yours have been bent and broken. Look to it that your honor and conscience be not stretched by the hangman's rope which your spying and stealing hath deserved."

A loud knocking interrupted this stirring interview.

"Colonel Clayborne! Colonel Clayborne!" called excited voices without. Clayborne flung open the door impatiently.

"A courier from Providence is without, sir," said Griggs, his

soldierly tones rising above the clamor. "By Lord Baltimore's orders, Governor Stone, with a fleet of twelve vessels, is advancing on the town. Captain Fuller asks if he must yield or fight."

"Fight!" was the answer, coupled with a fierce oath. "Fight every inch of the way! Have I stood against these cursed Calverts twenty years to yield to them now, now when the power that upheld them is in the dust? Fight! aye, and call every able-bodied man to mount and follow me! This boy comes with us," said Clayborne, turning to Giles. "Let him ride before you in the saddle, Griggs, and guard him as your prisoner. Hold to him, or I will, perchance, remember some things it is well for you that I forget."

And with this threat, which Griggs (whose past record was doubtless none of the fairest) received with a gruff "Aye, sir; I'll answer for him!" Clayborne hurried into the dusky hall, now filled with glancing lights and clamorous voices, and all the confusion of a sudden call to arms.

CHAPTER XIV.

A MIDNIGHT RIDE.

"ONE needs must gallop when the devil drives," growled Griggs, putting his heavy hand on Giles' shoulder, "and it is the devil has the whip hand of both of us to-night, my lad."

"Help me out of this peril, brave man, and my mother will give you what you ask, if it be half the broad acres of Avalon," said Giles, in an eager whisper.

But Griggs' tone suddenly grew hard and stern. "I am a soldier, and no trickster, boy. While I follow Colonel Clayborne you could not buy me with half the province of Maryland, though if chance made me his honest foe there is no one whose gullet I would so gladly slit. I am sorry for you; you are a brave lad and a strong one, but, nevertheless, you go with me, and I warn you it will be an ounce of lead in you if you try to give me the slip."

And Giles knew that further pleading or bribing would be alike useless, for he recognized in the character of his guard one of those reckless old men-of-arms who held to a rude code of honor and loyalty, even while they plunged remorselessly into all sorts of crime.

"Has any one salved or bound that torn limb of yours?" asked Griggs, whose movements seemed quite undisturbed by the clamor and excitement around him.

"No," answered Giles, shortly. "It scarcely seems worth

the trouble, as Colonel Clayborne threatens to stretch my neck beyond cure."

"Bah! Never physic to-morrow's ill, lad," said Griggs, brusklly. "Sit ye down and I will do what I can for you; we have a long, rough ride of it to-night, for the Colonel is swearing that we must make Elksford by day. He is near set wild with this news from Providence which has just come. It will be like pulling the carcass from a hungry wolf if the Papists strive to wrest his power from him now."

While Griggs thus descanted on the situation, he had drawn from the inner pocket of his jerkin a small metal box containing a white ointment, which he applied, with a touch gentle as that of a woman, to Giles' limb, which was still bloody from its laceration in the fox-trap; then binding the hurt with a strip of linen with which he was also provided, he added:

"Many a brave soldier hath gone to judgment before time for want of a bit of rag like that; it is a thing easily carried and sorely missed, so I never ride without it. Come now, my lad; while these fools are gabbling, we will take bite and sup, for a full stomach makes a stout heart as well as a strong arm."

And though Giles felt escape was hopeless, he knew he was in kindly though rough keeping, and that this rugged old soldier would do for him all which, according to his code, he honorably could.

In hall, court, and antechamber, all was clamor and confusion that well might have bewildered cooler heads. Men were loading guns, filling powder horns, shouting and answering orders; without, horses were being hastily fed and saddled; but Griggs, with his youthful prisoner, deliberately made his way to the great

kitchen, where the remains of a substantial repast were still smoking in pot and platter, and helped himself and Giles to "bite and sup" with scant ceremony. Then mounting his charge before him on the big gray horse that stood saddled and tethered to a post without, the old soldier was ready for a start, and soon the whole party, numbering twenty-five men, were galloping through the woods, dusky with nightfall and echoing with the sullen mutter of rising storm.

Worn out with fatigue and excitement as our hero was, that wild night ride seemed like some strange, fevered dream. He was borne on the galloping horse through the blackening forest, which was illumined now and then by gleams of lightning that only made the succeeding darkness more terrible, while the earth shook with thunderous echoes as if some wrathful Titan were waking from his sleep. All that Giles had heard of this William Clayborne of Kent came back to him gruesomely. He felt that he was in the power of one who had been to him and his, for long years, an untiring foe.

A powerful, wealthy, and ambitious man, owning large estates in Virginia, this William Clayborne had laid claim also to one of the fairest sections of Maryland, and from the first settlement of the province had disputed the authority of the Catholic Calverts. Twice before he had rebelled against Lord Baltimore's power, and once succeeded in driving the Governor of the province into exile.

It was Giles' father who had headed the expedition which finally succeeded in defeating this restless rebel, and banishing him, it was hoped, from Maryland soil forever, for which, as our hero guessed, Clayborne bore the name of Ventnor no good will.

But neither defeat nor exile had turned this fiery spirit from its purpose.

With spies and emissaries like James Wade, he had kept watch in the province, his pirate ships haunted its shores, neighboring Indians were roused into hostilities against the Colonists; finally he had joined the Puritan party in its hour of triumph and obtained the highest powers and authorities in the gift of the new government. But Lord Baltimore also had powerful friends at the court of the Lord Protector, and at any moment there might come a change, as Clayborne knew. The packet! the missing packet that the dying Wade had yielded! The restless leader galloped on through the Maryland woods to-night. There was fury in his breast that boded ill for Giles' safety on the morrow if he should still refuse to betray Father Maurice's trust.

Meanwhile the storm burst in all its fury, peal after peal of thunder reverberated through the hills like the continuous roar of a mighty battle, while the skies flamed as if with the wrath of an angry God.

"Only a madman would ride abroad to-night; a madman or a devil," muttered Griggs, tightening his hold of Giles as a deafening crash made his horse rear and prance. "And little good our haste will do us with Elksford foaming twelve feet deep, as it will after this storm; neither horse nor man can swim its tide. Eh, God have mercy! What's that?"

It was a blinding flash and a crash that seemed to shake heaven and earth; a huge oak went down, shivered from top to root under a thunderbolt.

Groans, shrieks, shouts, the snorts and cries of terrified horses echoed its fall.

"Who is down?" shouted the leader, as another flash of lightning showed what seemed to him a confused heap of men and horses struggling under the fallen boughs.

"Half a dozen of us, I believe," panted Griggs, as he stumbled up from the body of his horse. "My good gray, for one," he added, with an oath. "I'd rather it had been any human creature I know. And—and—the boy you gave me in charge."

"No," said Giles; who, beyond a fall that had made him see a thousand stars, was unhurt.

But a rude hand, clapped on his mouth in the darkness, silenced him. "Hist, ye young fool!" whispered Griggs.

"Who is it ye say is hurt?" asked the stern, quick tones of Clayborne. "Three of us thrown, sir," answered one of the men; "but only Griggs here hurt and his horse killed."

"Aye, aye," groaned Griggs; "horse and boy both killed. Little care I for the boy, but the horse—I could not find his mate this side of the ocean."

"Bah! you can pick a dozen as good from my stables at Romancoke. The boy dead, too, you say? Well, the hangman has been saved a job, for he was a truculent young knave. Mount, men! Mount again, Griggs! Lyle can carry double; so ride with him."

"Nay, sir," said Griggs. "I fear you must even leave me with the other dead, for there is a pain in my side that tells of a broken rib or two; maybe worse."

"I am sorry for you, my man," said Clayborne; "but I could not tarry to-night for my own brother. So you must e'en make the best of your bad luck. Ride on, my men; to the left there is an open stretch, and we must get out of this cursed tangle.

Three gold pieces to every man of you if we make Elksford by day."

"Aye, ride on!" muttered Griggs, shaking his clenched fist in the darkness as the horsemen clattered away through the storm. "It's little heed ye take either of man or beast that falls in your path, ye devil! Now ye can stand up, lad, and take breath. My good gray's fall hath saved ye from the hangman at all events, though if I had not choked the words on your lips you would have gained little by his loss. Eh! eh! but he was fine at a trot or a gallop, and knew my call amid twenty shouting men. Six years we have been comrades—closer than brothers, my good, gallant gray."

And while Griggs thus lamented, our hero, who had struggled to his feet in a sort of daze, began to realize the situation.

He was free again through Griggs' kindly strategy, for he knew the merciless Clayborne would never have left him if he had believed him alive; free, for his rough friend had no longer the will or power to hold him; free—but cast he knew not where in the midnight darkness and storm, with poor Griggs helpless and crippled on his hands. It spoke well for Giles' gentle training that his first thought was of the suffering man at his side, for betwixt pain and grief Griggs was groaning piteously.

"I am sorry for you," said Giles, laying his hand gently on the man's shoulder. "And the poor horse, too. I have cost you dear to-night, my friend; but if we get out of this trouble alive, you will find the Ventnors know how to thank and how to repay."

The storm was sobbing in a softer mood now. That last crashing bolt seemed to have spent its fury.

Man, boy, and horse were sheltered amid the boughs of the mighty oak that had thrown them to the earth in its fall, and that now stretched its great boughs above them like a huge tent.

Seated on his dead horse, with his head buried in his hands, Griggs was struggling sternly with grief and pain that nearly unmanned him, when Giles' words fell on his fierce spirit like a soothing balm.

"Nay; you owe me nothing, boy," he answered, gruffly, to hide the sudden softening of his heart. "The thought flashed on me as we fell together that you had better have your neck broken than stretched, and when you began to stir I found it wisest to keep you dead, as, in truth, I first had believed you were, for only death can loosen William Clayborne's clutch, as the story of this fair province of Maryland tells. And now that I can neither stand nor ride in his service, my fealty to Clayborne is at an end. I can hold you no longer; you are free."

"Not while you need me," said Giles generously. "I will make a litter of these boughs when the storm passes."

"For me to die upon?" groaned Griggs. "Nay; I ask no such comfort, lad. Go your way when the day breaks and leave me. Only I wish that it had been my head broken instead of my rib. It would have been a shorter and easier road to the devil."

"Hush, hush!" said Giles, his young voice quite stern now. "You should beg God's mercy, Griggs, instead of defying it."

"God's mercy!" echoed the old soldier. "That is a new word, boy, or perhaps an old one forgotten. It hath been God's justice and His vengeance and His wrath in all the preaching and praying I have heard for many a year. God's mercy! It hath a strange sound, and takes me back to the days of my youth.

If you could twist this broken rib of mine into place, I could tell you a story of your own Papists that hath turned the dull edge of my blade to many a reckless youth with hot blood boiling for King and Church. Take this bandage I brought with me; slash the jerkin with this knife, so—there—no leech could have done better!—no need to pray for God's mercy yet for Dave Griggs. It will turn my thoughts from my poor gray to talk of other things and other times, lad, as we wait for the break of day."

CHAPTER XV.

AN OLD SOLDIER'S STORY.

THE storm was sobbing itself to rest. Though rain still fell from the breaking clouds, it was like the penitential tears that follow some mad outburst of passion or pride. Leaning back amid the boughs of the sheltering oak, his hands clasped over his head, Giles listened eagerly while the old soldier began his story.

"It would have seemed only fitting if this thunderbolt had ended me as well as my good gray," said Griggs, bitterly, "for I have been inviting storm and peril ever since I was your age. My father was a stern Gospeler, and, like all of them, harsh in his training. It was the rod and the Book together, in season and out of season, and though my three brothers stood it, I was of more restive stuff, so I e'en broke loose from bit and curb when I was little more than sixteen, and ran away to sea, and it was full a score of years before I trod English turf again. Many and strange were my adventures, and some of them it would not be wise to tell, for I was a wild lad, and all the wilder for over-tight holding, for it is the tethered colt that when loosened breaks his neck in the madness of freedom, as we all know.

"It was soldiering and sailing as the humor took me, and I had plenty of choice, for the whole of Europe was in a seethe of blood and carnage, with kings and creeds grappling one another and ready to welcome a free lance who asked neither why nor where he fought, so that it brought him gold and plunder and

plenty of food and drink. Though, while I served a master I served him loyally, I recked little of cause or creed.

"I starved with the Huguenots during the long siege of La Rochelle, and fought with the Leaguers under Tilly, and then followed the flag of Gustav Adolf when he swept the Rhineland. If I were a scribe I could fill a book with the things that I have seen and heard, but as many of them are far better left untold I will pass over these days in silence, save to say that they left me fierce and pitiless as the wild beast that ranges the mountains, and as fearless of God and of man."

"Nay, I can not believe you were without pity," said Giles, quickly, "else your heart would not have warmed to me to-night."

"Bah!" said Griggs, "I but played an old soldier's trick to serve a bold lad, who deserves more of Fate than a halter. And I owe Clayborne no good will. He hath held a gallows rope dangling over my own neck this five years for an overquick blow that I dealt one of his knaves, and which sent him to the devil a trifle before his time. But all this has naught to do with my story.

"It was betwixt a change of masters that I found myself in the south of France, with my pouch emptied of its ill-gotten gold, and a fever burning in my veins that seemed like to make a short end of my story. I was making my way across the hills to find some good monks' hospice where I would be taken in, when I fell all in a stupor by the roadside, where I was found by a good old widow, who took me into her little cabin and physicked me with her herbs and tisanes until I began to mend.

"But in the mending another hurt came to me her simples could not heal. The black eyes of her young daughter had looked into mine, and thenceforth I was struck with love's madness.

Who or what was I to think of wife and home and the peace of fireside joys? Yet I did, lad. Whether it was the breath of the blooming roses or the white light of the southern moonbeams that laid their spell upon me, I know not." The speaker's rough voice grew low and shaken. "But I did dream of all these.

"My little Annette was but a slip of a girl, scarcely sixteen, and her good mother had reared her in that sheltered fold as good women in all lands rear their ewe lambs. So white, so pure she seemed to me, rough bearded soldier as I was, that I trembled before her as if at some shining presence that frightened me. But she, ah! she did not fear me, so long had I lain weak and helpless in her care, raving mayhap of wicked things in my delirium, but in a tongue she could not understand, that like all tender women her pity was already near to love. And so, when my eyes and lips spoke to her, she put her hand trustingly into mine, and we went to the abbey church in the valley and were made man and wife.

"True, the good priest looked at me with doubt, but those were wild times, when the best of men might well be questioned, and I lied to him right boldly in all things save that I had been a Soldier of the League and had fought for the Church, for this was true.

"So we were married, and I went back to the little cottage in the hills, and for a year or more—perchance my illness had left me weak and womanish—I was well content to tend the vines and press the grapes, and grind the wheat for Annette's baking. But with returning strength there came back the old riot in my veins, and the longing for the rush and struggle and clamor of the rude life of old. Yet I tried to hush the fierce, restless spirit

stirring within me, for a little babe had come to Annette's arms, and the young mother looked frail and wan, and her strength did not return.

" 'She needs the salt breath from the sea,' said the old women to her mother, and my heart leaped at the words, for I, too, had sickened of the vines and the mill and the hillside, and longed for the sound of waters and the leap of white waves. So with Annette and the babe I betook myself to Marseilles, where I found work loading and unloading the great ships that came to the wharves from the south and the north, aye, even from these far colonies of America.

" Ah! there was life enough for me now, with the crowded quays and the warehouses, and the wine shops with their brawlers and dicers, and soon I was ruffling and drinking with the rest, aye, and fighting, too, with all who crossed my fierce mood. Yet I ever went home sober and gentle to Annette, aye, and with coins in my pouch to buy her food and wine. But the day came after a drunken brawl when I could get no more work, and the next day and the next it was the same, for the rumor had gone around, mayhap, from some besotted boast of mine own, that I had been pirate as well as free lance, and the shipping masters would have no more of me.

" Then it was that, mad with drink and rage, and fear for my sick wife's sore need, that I knocked down a good bourgeois and relieved him of his pouch of gold and silver. But he was a sturdy man, and turned upon me with a stick that struck me senseless, and when I came to my wits I was in the galleys for having been a highwayman."

" The galleys," said Giles, curiously, as Griggs stopped at this

climax to take breath. "I have heard something of them from Father Maurice, but I fear I paid little heed to what he told. They are prison ships, are they not?"

"Aye, lad, prison ships! but that is a gentle name for them! If there be a place of torment like that of which our good Master Baxter bellows so uproariously, it can be to my thinking little worse than those same galleys. Ten years was my sentence, ten years to be chained with a gang of others, made devils by despair, and worked and fed and beaten like dogs. Ten years! and Annette and the babe ill, starving, dying among strangers!

"Ah, well! lad, I was a soldier; so I ground my teeth together and faced what was worse than ten thousand deaths. If I could have bitten off my chains I would have plunged without another thought into the waters below, glad to be riddled by the bullets that would have followed me, but I was held pitilessly by iron links to hideous life. I would not eat, I could not sleep; Annette, little Annette, with her babe starving and dying, was my thought night and day as I stared around me with eyes that did not see, and heard with ears that heeded not, and lived, a sullen, silent thing that had breath but no life.

"'You need waste no time on this man, good Father,' said the captain one day, as he guided a visitor through the galley. 'He is more than half mad.' The visitor turned to look at me. He wore the black frock and the shaven crown of the priests whom I had been taught to hate from childhood. The chained devil within me seemed to break loose at the sight, and I burst into all the foul invectives and maledictions that my wild life had taught me.

"'Did I not tell you so?' said the officer. 'Let us go on,

Father.' But the stranger lingered, and there was something in his eyes that hushed me. '*Pauvre garçon*,' he said, laying his hand upon my arm, 'look up. God's mercy can reach you even here. Can I do aught for you?'

"And then, then, lad, how it was I never knew, but in a moment or two I had told him of Annette and the babe, and the purse I had stolen to give them food.

" 'This man must be freed,' he said, turning to the captain. 'He has left a helpless wife to die, and his crime was one to which we should be merciful.'

" 'Nay, good Father, you ask too much,' said the officer. 'Justice is our business, not mercy.'

" 'He will go mad,' continued the priest, in a low voice.

" 'Ah, well! That is not my affair,' answered the captain, shrugging his shoulders.

" 'I will be accountable for him to the governor of the galleys,' said my friend.

" 'Impossible, *mon Père*! I alone can be accountable for my duty here.'

" 'True,' said the other, as if thinking, 'very true, my friend; each of us to our duty, you to yours and I to mine. It is God's law as well as man's. Ah, well! how many in this galley do you guard?'

" 'Four and twenty,' answered the captain.

" 'Then four and twenty it shall be still. Loosen his chain. Let him go save his dying wife and child. I will take his place.'

" 'But, *mon Père*!' said the captain, breathless with amazement.

" 'Four and twenty prisoners you have to guard and you lose

none,' was the smiling answer. 'Loosen his chain, my friend. You serve your master and let me serve mine. I will take this man's place that he may go save his wife and child.'

"And he did, lad, he did!" continued Griggs; "for there seemed a power about him that none could withstand. I was freed that day, freed to go find my little Annette. The babe was dead, and some good women had cared for my poor little wife, but the grief and the loss and my flight from her—for she had heard naught from me and thought I had deserted her—were too much for her weakness to bear. She died in my arms within two days from my return."

The speaker's voice broke in a hoarse sob. For a moment there was a silence through which came the soft fall of the rain on the rustling boughs. It was Giles who first spoke.

"But the priest, the good priest who took your place—did you leave him there?"

"Nay, I fell ill myself, lad, and for three weeks knew nothing. And then—then as soon as I could stagger to my feet, I made my way back to the galley to relieve my benefactor if he were still there. But the captain, as soon as he recognized me, bade me begone, for I had caused stir enough. It was no other than the new made almoner of the galleys, who had come unknown to all to look over his charge and who had taken my place, aye, and kept it until some great lady had recognized him in his chains. Mayhap you have heard of the good man, lad. His name was Vincent de Paul."

"Aye, I have heard of him," answered Giles. "Father Maurice knew him well, and hath often told us how he set young and old aflame with the fire of his charity. He lives still in France,

an old, old man, for my Aunt Clothilde, who is a nun, did write of him in her last letter to my mother."

"I am glad to hear this of him, lad, for truly he hath lived in my thoughts and heart these thirty years, and as I said, the memory hath turned the flat edge of my blade to many a brave youth whom else I might have run through with a soldier's scant mercy. For all the softness died out of my heart with Annette, and I have been a fierce old swashbuckler without home or country ever since. But I have never forgotten that touch on my arm, that kind voice in my ear; they saved me from madness, lad. I have never forgotten the good man who took my place in the galley and sent the poor slave free to his dying wife. There is a name coupled with Annette's in my heart, and it is that same Vincent de Paul."

"Poor Griggs," said Giles softly, as the old soldier's voice broke again. "I would that you could see him, that he could write still better things on your brave heart, for my Aunt Clothilde speaks of him as a holy saint, whom all France reveres. But you must talk no more now, for you are shaken and weary."

"Aye, shaken and weary, lad, and doubtless you are the same, but I am old and used to night watches and waking; you are young and need the rest and strength that makes the bone and sinew of a man. Pillow your head here on my poor gray and try to sleep, while I watch, as there may be wolves or wild cats near."

"Nay, you need rest more than I do, for you have been sorely hurt," said Giles. "Let me watch while you sleep, good Griggs."

"All the poppy-juice in the province would not give me sleep to-night, lad, and with this poor carrion here for bait, it would be madness for both of us to close our eyes. Yours are

heavy already. You could not watch, lad, even if you would, so take your rest while I keep guard."

Giles needed no further invitation, for, indeed, as Griggs said, his eyes were nearly closed. Pillowing his head on the dead horse, he was soon lost in the heavy slumber of healthy youth.

CHAPTER XVI.

"TO ARMS."

WHEN Giles awoke the sky was rosy with the dawn; birds were singing in the trees; the tears of the past night were glittering like diamonds on bough, twig and turf. But the shattered oak, the dead gray, the roar of the swollen stream, told that the storm had done work which all Nature's morning smiles could not repair.

Poor Griggs, wan and worn from pain and vigil, smiled grimly as his young comrade blinked up at him in sleepy bewilderment.

"Where are we?" Giles asked, as he sat up and stared around him.

"That is what I have been trying to reckon," answered Griggs. "Some five leagues north of Prestonbanks whence we started last night, and not more than two hundred yards from the Patuxent, to judge by its roar, and in a fine plight with this broken rib of mine pressing on me so that I can scarcely take breath or step should man or beast come nigh to do us harm. Haply, the good angels in whom you Papists believe watched over you last night, for I would have been of little help. But now, lad, that it is light, you had best look out for your own safety, for God only knows who may come this way. More of Clayborne's kind, may-hap; so be off and find friends while you can."

"And leave you alone!" exclaimed Giles. "Nay; I am not such a graceless rogue as that. If we are where you think us, there is an Indian settlement near by. So rally your strength,

good Griggs; lean on my arm, and together we can reach it in less than an hour's walk."

Supporting his comrade of the night, Giles slowly made his way toward the river, where they found a little settlement of the "Patuxents," who had given their name to the stream. A few very old men, with some squaws and young children, were the only representatives of this powerful tribe; the braves had doubtless caught the war-cry of the pale-faces and scattered to fight in their own way. Giles, who could talk Indian as well as his native English, easily secured shelter and assistance for his companion, and one of the old Indians, who was a medicine man, skilfully doctored the broken rib, while the squaws gave highly colored descriptions of the prevailing excitement in reply to Giles' inquiries.

According to these stories, the great water of the Chesapeake was black with strange ships, the warriors of the pale-faces were pressing up along its banks in ranks like the tasseled corn, everywhere the war-cry was sounding, and the young braves and the old were pouring forth from the towns and the farm houses.

Giles listened with flushed face and kindling eyes, but Griggs, stretched on his couch of skins in the old squaw's cabin, laughed her picturesque account to scorn. "Injun lies, lad; there may be trouble and bloodshed, aye, and fierce battle, but neither ships nor warriors in any numbers can these new countries boast. Ah! if you could see war indeed, such as I have seen. Anhalt and Prague, and the charge of the Flemish horse on the Elbe, and Lutter—those were fights to stir one's blood! These, bah! You hide behind a tree and shoot a painted savage and call it war. However, if you would be at the child's play, go, lad, go! I

know the fever that comes into young hearts at the clank and clatter of arms, and I would not keep you."

"Nay; that I can not," said Giles, with a regretful sigh as he thought of his mission and the packet hidden under the rocks near Prestonbanks. "I have work to do first, Griggs, and now that you are safe, I must go seek it."

A beady-eyed little Indian consented to be his guide, and after some persuasion, drew out a small canoe from its hiding-place in the alders and launched it in the swollen stream.

Borne by the swift southward current at a speed that needed no help from the paddle or oar, the little boat within two hours was floating under the same high banks where Chico and Giles had wandered the day before.

Carefully concealing the little craft in a sheltered cove, Giles left his keen-eyed young guide in charge, and, leaping ashore, scrambled up the ridge in quest of his hidden packet. It required all the woodsman's craft he possessed to trace his way back to the scene of yesterday's mishap, but, luckily, he had learned from Chico something of trail hunting. Guided by a hundred signs that would have escaped eyes less trained to quick, keen observation, he at last reached the place.

There were no young Covenanters engaged in mimic marches and battle to-day; the grim game had become a reality, and they were on guard in their threatened homes, for, even though the conflict might be far away, there was ever the dread of the Indians catching the note of battle and swooping down upon the manors and farms in absence of their masters.

The forest silence was unbroken, but there was the cruel fox-trap in which he had been caught; there were the guns his

tormentors had dropped when they scattered before sturdy Griggs and his mates; there was the rock under which he had hidden Father Maurice's packet.

Aye, but the rock had been stirred, the earth loosened, the packet was gone. For a moment Giles stood breathless with dismay; then there came a sudden sense of relief. His task had been taken from him; he could do no more. He was free, free to join the other bold youths who were rushing to battle for honor and right; free to strike down that grim Puritan power whose iron grasp he had felt so cruelly; free to uphold the cross of Calvert against those who would tear it down in the beautiful land it had blessed.

Aye; he could go with the rest—with Mark and Gerard Stone, and the young Mortimers, and bold Tom Darrell, and Jack Fairfax, who were doubtless marching bravely along the shores of the Chesapeake even now. And with the glad quickening of brain that came with the stirring blood and strengthening purpose, he remembered that a short distance beyond the opposite shore of the Patuxent was the holding of his father's old redemptioner, big Jack Barnes. Big Jack, so called from his huge size, was far too heavy both in wit and weight to take any active part in the turmoils of the time, but that he would do all he could for a Ventnor of Avalon Giles well knew.

So across the river sped the little canoe, and when our hero could see the blazed trees marking Big Jack's domain, he dismissed his little guide with a handful of coin and betook himself to the log cabin in the hills, where Big Jack had vegetated comfortably for the last ten years undisturbed by wars or rumors of wars.

Yet, dull of wit as he was, he nearly lost breath and speech at sight of the "young master," dusty, blood-stained, ragged and weary, at his door.

"Eh, sir!" he gasped, for the Ventnors of Avalon had ever seemed to him beings beyond the changes of time or fate. "It's never ye, Master Giles, like to this?"

"Aye, but it is, honest Jack," was the grim answer, "and likely to be worse than this if you can not lend me a horse, for I have been limping on a lame leg half the day, with prisoner and halter waiting for me, mayhap, if these Puritan dogs hunt me down."

"Eh, sir!" gasped Big Jack again, his broad, ruddy cheeks paling; "are they behind ye now?"

"Not yet," said Giles, "but I would put more miles between us than my own legs can carry me just now. So for the sake of the old times I have come to you, good Jack, for help."

"Eh, Master Giles! Master Giles!" groaned Big Jack; "you were ever a wild dare-devil from the time you could stand, and it's sore trouble to me that you may bring to-day, for I am neither nimble of foot nor wit, and so strive to keep my peace with all sides.

"But if the chase is upon you, it shall never be said Jack Barnes gave his young master to the hounds, so you shall have the fastest mare in my stables. my own Black Bess. Five leagues an hour she can make with a touch of the spur to keep her on her mettle," continued Jack, as he led the way to the stables. "There she is, Master Giles. Take her and be off—before the pack is down upon us both."

"Do not fear," said Giles, as he joyfully mounted Black Bess.

"I'll lead the chase far from you, Jack. And if I live, Black Bess shall be stabled safely with your old crony, Nick Brooks, by sundown."

"Nay; do not spare the beast," said Jack; "keep her while you have need of her, Master Giles. Your good father did as much for me and more. Keep to the east, and with Black Bess on a trot you will reach the Chesapeake in less than an hour. And God speed you to safety and friends, young master," concluded Big Jack, anxiously.

"Amen to that!" said Giles. "And if you should ever need a good turn yourself, Ventnor of Avalon will not forget he is your debtor if he ever again has aught he can call his own."

Waving his hand to this heavy friend, who stood looking after him with troubled eyes, Giles cantered gaily off. Soon the blue waters of the Chesapeake were stretching before him, and Black Bess was put to her mettle along its shores to join the friends whom Giles knew were rallying near.

Such a joyous sense of freedom had succeeded to the misery and hopelessness of the previous day, that Giles could have sung aloud in the gladness of his heart to the music of the great waves that, still white-capped from the late tempest, were surging and breaking on the shore with the deep, hoarse voice of the sea.

So into Giles' young life had swept the storm, waking the slumbering pulses of the boy into the full vigor and strength of the man.

Now as he galloped on, the solitude began to quicken as if at some rousing call. Men on foot and on horseback came pressing northward along the same road. Others were waiting in groups by the water side for boats and pinnaces that were to bear them

up the bay. As Giles stopped to let his mare drink, he was hailed from the shore:

"What news, young master? You seem riding fast and far."

"No news," answered Giles, who had learned to be cautious in speech.

"There is rumor that the Governor's fleet hath reached Providence," said the other, "and the knaves there are shaking with fear. Already Captain Fuller hath sent messengers beseeching mercy. So, on! on! or ye will be all too late to share in the rout."

Giles needed not this appeal to quicken his flight. Already Black Bess was speeding on through the lengthening shadows. The last rays of sunset were just reddening the bay when her rider drew her up white with foam at Nick Brooks' tavern.

Porch and yard were filled with roystering guests. As Giles tumbled wearily from his saddle, half a dozen hearty voices greeted him. "'Tis Giles Ventnor, by the rood! Strong-Arm of Avalon! Avalon! Avalon!" Gerard Stone and Ed Wintour and bold Tom Darrell and merry Jack Fairfax pressed around him in glad welcome.

"Where did you drop from?" was the gay question, as they drew him with them into the hall that was crowded with armed men, drinking, smoking, feasting.

"We heard that Avalon had been seized by the enemy; but of its master, whether he had been lost, slain, or stolen, none could tell."

"He hath had a touch of all three," said Giles, laughing. "Talk not of adventures, my mates, till you hear all that I have undergone since we last parted."

"Tell us, tell us!" was the general cry.

"Nay; the story will keep," answered Giles, whose late experiences had taught him caution. "Let it be enough to say that I have just escaped fagot and halter, to say naught of prison and chains. Rather tell me the good tidings I have missed by not being with you sooner—as God knows I would have been if I had had my will."

"You have missed nothing as yet," said Gerard Stone. "Our father, with his fleet of twelve ships, is just beyond here at the mouth of the Severn. He has sent despatches by Luke Barbour and others demanding the submission of Providence to Lord Baltimore, but the stubborn dogs refuse to yield. So by to-morrow morning we are likely to see hot work, both by river and shore, for the great merchantman and other ships lying in the harbor are taking part with the Puritan knaves. There will be such a battle as the province hath never seen or known."

"And I am in time for it," said Giles, triumphantly. "Let me get some supper, boys, and stretch my limbs for a few hours."

"Of supper there is enough for all," said Tom Darrell. "But as for bed, we boys will have to scatter through the stables in the hay, for the house here is crowded from roof to ground."

"A pile of hay would seem like one of my mother's down-beds to-night," said Giles.

"Come on, then, and I will see that you find it," said Tom. "For, in truth, Giles, you look spent."

Under Tom's friendly guidance our hero secured a bountiful supper of bread, milk, cheese, and other homely fare, and found his way to a pile of sweet-smelling hay in a stable loft, where he was soon lost in a heavy, dreamless sleep.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE BATTLE OF THE SEVERN.

A RUMBLE as of distant thunder half roused Giles from his sleep, but he only rolled over in the hay, while the sound mingled with troubled dreams. Now he was wandering through the subterranean passageways of Fair Oaks with the earth trembling over his head, now riding wildly through midnight forests echoing with the roar of the tempest, now a sharp, shrill voice awoke him to sudden consciousness.

"Eh, lad, here be two of them left behind," and Giles started up, to see the morning sunshine streaming in the stable window, Tom Darrell's curly brown head still pillowed on the hay beside him, and a stupid, freckle-faced lad surveying both of his lodgers with round-eyed dismay.

"Tom!" shouted Giles, "Tom, wake up! wake up! It is morning and—what's that?" he asked, breathlessly, as the thunderous sound again shook the loft.

"It is the guns," answered the stable-boy, in a frightened tone—"eh, masters, did you ever hear the like of them? And ye must have been deaf or drunk, or dead with sleep, not to hear them before this, for the ships on the river have been belching fire and smoke ever since daybreak, and all the rest of them that bided here last night gone off shouting and marching two hours ago."

"Gone and left us," exclaimed Tom Darrell, springing to his feet. "It was a scurvy trick to play upon us."

"Nay, there was shout and call that might have waked the dead," said the boy, "and every one stumbling and staggering up at the dawn when word came that all were to rally on the field below Alder Creek, for the Governor's fleet could do naught against the great ships on the river—eh, God ha' mercy! there they go again—was there ever heard such devil's music?" concluded the terrified lad as another cannonade shook the walls.

But Giles and Tom had rushed by him, leaped from the stable windows, and were already in the tap room, where mine host was berating his trembling maids. All around was a litter of scattered drinking cups, overturned benches, broken victuals, that told of midnight wassail and early morning alarm.

"To work, ye fools, to work!" scolded old Nick. "Why are ye cowering like frightened sheep? D'ye think shot and bullet can reach ye here? Clear up the place, for food and shelter will be sore needed by many a brave man when this day's work is done. Eh, lads!" as his eye fell upon Giles and Tom, "what news d'ye bring? We are battering the rogues down to their marrow-bones, I'll wager, thunder as they may. What news? What news?"

"None at all, for we were left behind in the stable loft sleeping like logs," answered Tom, bitterly. "That last noggin of ale I took last night cost me the bravest show of my life. But give us a mouthful to break our fast, good Nick, and we'll be off to take our share of the work even now, if it be not too late."

"Nay, nay, list to that! list to that!" said Nick, excitedly, as the cannon sounded again from the river. "There was blun-

dering somewhere among the graypates at St. Mary's, when a ship that carries tongues like that was let pass. Already the Governor hath been driven from his own fleet of ships and forced to attack by shore. Fuller has met him down by the creek, where the fight rages now."

"Quick, Tom, quick!" said Giles, who had snatched a few mouthfuls from the dish the willing host had filled for his young guests. "Here, take your reckoning from this, Master Brooks," and the boy tossed the gold chain he wore around his neck on the table. "And look well to the mare I leave in your stable. She belongs to big Jack Barnes, to whom you will return her if you see me no more. Tom, quick! quick! or the fight will be won without us, and the Wintours and Storys cry out upon us as laggards forever after."

Wild with excitement, the boys were dashing away when Nick Brooks called after them.

"Tarry a moment, young masters. Ye will want more than fists to do the work that is waiting for ye down yonder. So take these," and he handed down guns and powder-horns, which the boys had quite forgotten in their haste. "Make them talk, lads, make them talk," said the old man, excitedly; "if it were not for these two gouty legs of mine I would be with ye."

Snatching up the firearms, the young recruits sped away. It was at least a mile to the creek where the fight was raging, but as they dashed up the hill and around a turn in the path the whole scene of battle burst upon their sight.

There was the beautiful Severn sweeping to meet the broader reaches of the Bay, the little Puritan settlement of Providence, or 'Annapolis as it was called in the later time, its houses half hidden

in the budding trees. All around were the beauty and freshness of the early spring. But bellowing over the smiling waves came the roar of the cannon from the deck of the great merchantman in the harbor, while cowering like a flock of frightened birds before her menace was the Governor's little white-winged fleet, that had sailed so triumphantly up the Bay in fancied strength and pride.

A pitiful naval battle, indeed, it would seem to the young eyes that in these our days look out on that same Severn, with sight trained to follow each motion of the mighty warships, from whose peaks floats the flag of a nation which these Colonial boys were never to see.

Yet the strong, free spirit, that more than a hundred years later flung the starry banner to the skies, glowed in the eyes and hearts of these two young Americans of 1655, as they stood on the Maryland hillside this fair spring morning, gazing breathlessly on this opening page of their country's story.

Down the smoke-veiled banks of the little creek to the right was raging the battle of the Severn, perhaps the bloodiest struggle of Maryland's Colonial history.

Governor Stone had sailed up the Chesapeake with his little fleet to find unexpected defiance. The Golden Lion and other merchantmen in the harbor were prepared to defend the little Puritan settlement. The cannon these armed ships carried were too much for his little Colonial flotilla, and he had been forced to withdraw his boats and disembark his men for an attack by land.

But even here the Puritans, led by old Cromwellian soldiers, had the advantage over his untrained forces. Without waiting

for him to descend upon their little settlement, they had headed him off by a circuitous march and met him on the banks of a creek that had impeded his advance.

The rattle and crack of musketry, the fierce shouts and cries of the opposing factions, were borne in strange, hideous clamor on the morning breeze, while through the swirling clouds of smoke Giles caught sight of his kinsman's standard waving over a dense mass of struggling men.

"Look, Tom, look! Gerard is in the thick of it, and sore beset on all sides. Let us to his rescue, quick! quick!" And dashing wildly forward, stumbling over rocks, scrambling through thickets, the lads were soon in the midst of the shouting, struggling combatants.

"Hey, for St. Mary's! ho, for St. Mary's! Strike for the cross of Calvert! for God and His Blessed Mother! Ho, for St. Mary's!" rose the Catholic battle-cry.

"In God is our strength! Strike in God's name! Down with the Babylonites! Down with the idolaters!" came the opposing shouts of the Puritans.

Stern old soldiers, as many of these were, trained in the long, hard-fought fight between Covenant and King, they were more than a match for the Governor's wavering, undisciplined recruits. On all sides the Catholics were falling, now yielding, now rallying at some gallant leader's call.

"Calvert! Calvert! On for the cross of Calvert!" shouted the brave Eltonhead, as he strove to marshal the broken lines beside the creek.

"Rally, ye cowards! rally! rally!" thundered the sturdy Captain Cornwallis to his scattering force.

"Down with the Babylonites! Smite them hip and thigh! The Lord hath delivered them to us! Smite and spare not!" came the stern, victorious shout of the Puritans, as they pressed forward pitilessly on their flying foes. Giles, to his fierce despair, found himself borne down by the panic-stricken Marylanders, who were scattering in all directions.

"The Governor is taken! Fly! fly! All is lost!" was the cry on every side. But "Ho, for St. Mary's! hey, for St. Mary's! Rally for God and Our Lady!" still echoed hopefully above the tumult, as here and there a gallant group held the ground against the Puritan onslaught. The orange and black standard still waved down the ravine, where the flower of the Maryland youth, rallying around the fearless Eltonhead, were making a last desperate stand behind a barricade of fallen trees.

Stumbling over the dead and dying, clubbing their way right and left with the muskets which they could not stop to load and fire, Tom and Giles made for this spot.

"Avalon! Avalon!" went up the young Marylanders' welcoming shout as Giles sprang forward just in time to catch the standard from Gerard Stone's shattered arm as he went down under a Puritan bullet. "Stand to the flag with Strong-Arm of Avalon! Rally, men! Rally! Ho, for St. Mary's!"

Then followed a time which ever afterward seemed to Giles a wild, blurred fever dream of shot and shout, groans and shrieks and prayers, of friendly faces grimy with smoke and blood, vanishing one by one from his side, of Tom Darrell sinking with a low moan at his elbow, of bold Jack Fairfax dropping dead at his feet.

Ah! that last stand behind the fallen trees has come down on

the pages of history to this, our day, and of all the young heroes who held this one vantage point of a lost field against a victorious foe, our Strong-Arm was the last to yield. "Ho, for St. Mary's! ho for St. Mary's! Rally for God and Our Lady!" rang out the clear, boyish voice, even while the fierce shouts, "Surrender, ye fools! surrender!" were sounding in his ears, and the Puritans swept in conquering numbers over the frail breastwork. Then came a stunning blow that blotted out heaven and earth to him, and Giles knew nothing more.

CHAPTER XVIII.

STRONG-ARM OF AVALON.

THERE were darkness and desolation in the Land of the Sanctuary. All along the shores of the Potomac and the Patuxent, by the blue reaches and reedy coves of the Chesapeake, from manor house to cabin, came the voice of Rachel mourning for her children.

Of the Governor's whole force that had marched so bravely to battle, not half a dozen had escaped; fifty were killed or wounded and the rest taken prisoners.

The Puritans proved pitiless conquerors to their vanquished foes. Although they had surrendered on the promise of quarter, Lord Baltimore's envoy and several others had been shot in cold blood, while the Governor and his council lay in prison under sentence of death, and a gloom like that of the grave rested on all Maryland.

Drifting back to consciousness, after what seemed a long, troubled dream of darkness and pain, our hero found himself stretched on a couch of moss under a roof of twisted boughs, through which the spring sun was filtering cheerily. The tall, stately figure of his old Indian nurse was bending over a savory broth cooking on a fire of fagots near by, and at his side watched a familiar face, with bright, faithful eyes, that had not winked for sleep ten days and nights.

"Chico," murmured Giles, stretching out his hand to his foster-brother, "where—where am I?"

The dark eyes flashed joyfully, but Chico answered in an unmoved voice: "My brother was left for dead with the rest, but in the darkness I found him. I brought him here, that our mother Nona might give him back to life. We are hiding him as the fox hides its cubs when the hunters blow their horns."

"Hiding!" echoed Giles, whose wits were not yet clear. "What has happened, Chico?"

"All things evil," answered Chico, gloomily. "The Great Spirit has turned His face from His people."

And little by little, for both Nona and Chico were slow to speak, Giles learned the overwhelming disaster that had fallen upon his friends, the cruel vengeance the victorious Puritans had already wreaked upon four of their hapless prisoners, the sentence of death that rested upon the Governor and his Council, and, so it was rumored, was to be carried into execution on the morrow's noon, to the terror and desolation of the whole province.

"Chico! Chico!" said Giles, despairingly, "if we had not quarreled this woe might have been averted. Together we could have guarded Father Maurice's packet which was to bring peace and quiet to the land. If I had not been a fool—a dull, blundering fool!"

"Hush! hush!" said Chico; "my brother must not talk or the fever will rise in his blood. The message of the dead is not lost. It is here." And from the hunting-pouch that swung around his neck he drew carefully the sealed packet.

"Chico!" exclaimed Giles, "where did you find it?"

"Under the earth beneath the rock," answered Chico, calmly.

"My heart grew troubled after I left my brother; I thought of the strange ways of the forest which he could not track, of the wild beasts and evil men, and I turned back and followed his steps until his trail was lost by the broken fox-trap, amid the burnt grass and the marks of many horses' feet.

"Looking around to see what evil had come to Strong-Arm, I found the rock and the loosened earth and the packet of the black-robe where my brother had hidden it. Since I could follow him no more, I took it to my mother, Nona, who can read the stars and the waters and hear the secrets of the winds, and see what is far from her eyes. She bade me follow the war-cry of the pale-faces, for my brother would be among their braves. We came through the forest and across the river to find him lying where the dead were thick as the fallen leaves after the frost. And we brought him here."

"My mother! my poor mother!" said Giles, who had followed Chico's words with breathless attention as memory slowly awakened. "Does she believe me dead, or hath she heard from you?"

"Nona sent her the message; we could not speak or write—the first flower of spring and a lock of your hair—she will understand."

"God grant she may," said Giles, as he turned restlessly on his couch, his sunken eyes fixed on the packet which Chico had placed in his hand.

Ah, what woe it might have spared! What bloodshed it might have saved! What cruel vengeance it might have averted!—this messenger of peace. Now it was too late—too late.

"The blood will burn again in my brother's veins if he

talks," said Chico, in a soothing tone. "He must sleep and find strength."

Nona drew near with a gourd of broth, which Giles drank feverishly, and then, closing his eyes again, tried to shape the confusing thoughts and images that were pressing upon his returning consciousness. He had been stunned by a murderous blow from the flat end of a heavy musket, but nature was rallying now with feverish strength.

The scenes of the past week rose before his quickening brain in bewildering phantasmagoria, and through them all one thought, one purpose slowly but clearly took shape and life. The packet—the trust in which he had failed—even yet might help to save the brave men who were in the cruel grasp of the Puritan power. He must keep his word, his promise to the dead; he must deliver the packet as he had sworn, even at the cost of his life.

Then chilling visions of dungeon chains and halter would flit before his mind, Clayborne's threat of vengeance would echo in his ear, Chico's half-hushed story of the pitiless cruelty with which the victors were treating their conquered foes; a shudder would come over our young hero's frame, for his nerves were weak and his arm had lost its power; only the brave spirit arose, strong and faithful, to the call of duty and truth.

Aye, he must go! He must take the packet to Captain Fuller at Providence! Giles emptied the gourd of warm broth three times at Nona's bidding, and feigned sleep that she might leave him to go for fagots and water, while Chico set traps in the woods that they might have birds and hares for food. Then while these faithful watchers were away, Giles rose from his couch, a gaunt, shaking specter of the bold Strong-Arm of Avalon, and, taking

the packet, set forth to fulfil his mission, to keep the word he had pledged to the dead.

* * * * *

There was a stern council assembled in the little meeting house at Providence that night. The first wild exultation of victory was over, the first fierce outburst of vengeance spent.

True, the Rev. Hiram Baxter still thundered his fierce tirades to groups of grim-faced listeners.

"Babylon hath fallen, hath fallen! We must crush her to the earth and her children who are in her! Not a stone must be left on a stone! Woe be to the weaklings who would spare! Woe be to those who would sheathe the sword of the Lord before the Moabites and Amalekites have been smitten down in their idolatrous pride, and the Promised Land given to God's people. Woe be to the men in the high places!"

"Enough, Master Baxter," the cold, grave voice of the old soldier, Captain Fuller, interrupted this vengeful harangue.

"It is not of the Moabites and Amalekites that we must speak to-night. We have met to discuss the sentence that hath been passed, over-hastily, perhaps, on the prisoners who have fallen into our hands.

"Captain Clayborne, whose voice should be all powerful in this council, having been detained by the high floods of the Patuxent until the battle was over, hath sent message that to us who have gained the victory he leaves the glory and the spoils, and he hath returned to his Virginia plantation, leaving all weighty matters in my hands. So many divers pleadings and petitions have reached me in regard to this Governor Stone and his council

that I have called this meeting that in calm and grave discussion we may decide their fate."

"Let them die—die as it hath been decreed!" shouted the Rev. Hiram and half a score of his kind.

"Your wives and daughters have been pleading with tears and lamentations for their lives," said Captain Fuller, gravely.

"Aye; and sterner voices than those of women," said an old Cromwellian soldier, stepping forward. "In the name of a score of my mates I do protest against the slaughter of brave men who surrendered on promise of quarter."

"No quarter! None! none!" shouted the Baxter faction, fiercely. "The curse of the Lord will be upon us if we spare. To death with the idolaters!"

"Nay; we claim mercy, mercy!" came the opposing cry.

"Let them die, as hath been decreed!"

"Their blood will be upon ye as murderers!"

The conflicting shouts made a very babel which Fuller endeavored vainly to still, when there came another tumult and clamor without, and dragged by a couple of guards, followed by a shouting, hooting crowd, a strange figure staggered into the council room. A boy with his gaunt form wrapped in an Indian blanket, his long locks falling disheveled over his deathly white face and his burning eyes, his limbs shaking with the weakness of fever.

"What—what madman is this?" asked Fuller, angrily.

"A madman indeed he seemeth, sir; for it is the youth who held the barricade of logs until every man around him was dead or a prisoner. How he hath escaped death to court it like this now, we can not say; but he declares that he bears a packet

which he will deliver into no hands but yours. He must have traveled miles with it, for he seems sorely spent."

"Captain William Fuller, which is he?" The words came almost in a whisper from the messenger's lips.

"Here," said the stern old soldier, touched despite himself with pity for the fainting, sinking youth, to whose desperate bravery on the battlefield he had borne witness. "Do you crave death, foolish boy, that you come here like this?"

"I promised to put this into your hands," panted Giles, as he gave the packet to Captain Fuller. "Until you read it, sir, stay the death-sentence, for it is of merciful import, I know."

"Of import, indeed!" said the old soldier, in a startled tone, as he glanced at the seal. "Despatches from the Home Government that have been delayed or intercepted, God knoweth how. There must have been false or foul work somewhere. The council is dismissed until I can take further cognizance of these papers which bear the Lord Protector's sign and seal. Guard the boy until I question him further."

The command was needless. His work done, Giles had fallen, white and senseless, into the arms of his guards.

The full import of his mission Giles never knew, for the wary old Puritan, Fuller, found it wisest to keep his own counsel, but the prisoners were saved, the sentence of death repealed, and the reign of terror that followed the battle of the Severn was over. When, a week after his bold venture into Captain Fuller's presence, that stern, old soldier came into the room where our hero was slowly recovering strength and health under Puritan care, there was a grim friendliness in his manner that told Giles he had nothing to fear.

Frankly the boy told his story, and though when he spoke of Clayborne's threats, the listener's grizzled brows knit in a frown, he made no comment.

"Thrice have you been in the wolf's jaws, lad," he said, grimly, when Giles had finished. "You had best beware in the future. If you would save yourself and your lands, take ship to the old country and bide there until these troubles are past, for Clayborne's vengeance may o'ertake you yet—and from that I can not save you."

Giles took the old Puritan's hint. With his mother and Margot he sailed in his own good ship, *La Belle Marie*, for France, leaving Avalon nominally in the possession of his true friend, Captain William Fuller, who, during the troubled years that followed, held it in his own name and saved it from confiscation.

Four beautiful years the young Marylanders spent in the old chateau of their French ancestors on the banks of the Loire, and the Strong-Arm of Avalon gained a knightly skill and grace that the New World could not give, while dainty little maid Margot grew into more exquisite bloom and beauty.

Yet their young hearts ever turned wistfully to their forest home, and when at last peace was restored, the Lord Proprietor's power reestablished, and Governor Philip Calvert ruled over the Province of Maryland, there was a joyful fête at Avalon. Arches of greenery spanned the roads, bonfires blazed on the hillsides, old Harvey presided over a mighty barbecue that feasted half the province. And from far and near the shores of the Chesapeake, the Patuxent, the Potomac, in boat and barge and pinnace, on pillion and horseback and in coach, came the Colonial dames and cavaliers, youths and maidens, to welcome the Ventnors of

Avalon back to their own. There were the Storys, the Wintours, the Fairfaxes, sturdy Tom Darrell, none the worse for the Puritan bullet in his shoulder, Gerard Stone, ready to fight life's battle with one arm, Griggs, who had beaten his sword into a plowshare and turned comfortable farmer under the influence of a cheery Catholic wife. Big Jack Barnes was there, and Nick Brooks, and old Martin, trembling with age and joy, for the de Veres had come back to Fair Oaks with the triumph of the Calverts.

Moving graciously through the great rooms, welcoming all who came, was Madame Ventnor in a gown of velvet seeded with pearls, that was the wonder of the province, and dainty maid Margot, grown into woman's height and loveliness, but looking still the Lily of Avalon in her misty robe of white, and with her another, on whom many an eye turned with curious admiration. Such a strange, beautiful young creature she was, with great flashing black eyes and glowing cheeks and dark locks twined with flowers, and a shimmering gown that seemed woven of the hues of dawn.

"Who is it?" whispered Mistress Ann Fairfax to her friend and gossip, Dorothy Wintour.

"She plays the rose well to pretty Margot's lily, and it is hard to tell which one would bear away the palm. Who is the dark-eyed beauty? Some noble cousin from France, doubtless."

"Nay," laughed Dorothy; "where are your eyes and ears? Have you not heard how Deborah Wade went back to the old country three years ago, where she died, leaving that wild Judith of hers in a convent in France, where Madame Ventnor's sister, the saintly Sœur Clothilde, made a Christian of the little witch?"

They say she hath grown to be a marvel of grace and wit, and it is whispered—”

What was whispered Mistress Dorothy found no time to tell, for just then there came a glad tumult without, and the coach of the guest of honor, Governor Calvert, swept up to the door surrounded by a group of young cavaliers on horseback. Among them was a slender, dark-skinned youth, the young chief Chico, who in the name of all the friendly tribes to the east and west and north had brought gifts of greeting and submission to the new Governor.

And heading the goodly company that had come to honor his father's house, glad, graceful, radiant, in the strength and pride of his twenty years, rode our stalwart young Colonial Cavalier, whose children and whose children's children were to hand down to the coming years the name and story of “Strong-Arm of Avalon.”

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